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GAY CORPORATE LEADERS

DONNA ROSE

OCCUPATION: Information technologies consultant; former senior IT program manager at Dell
COMPANY: Self-employed
AGE: 47
RESIDENCE: Scottsdale, Ariz.
HOMETOWN: Chicago
RELATIONSHIP STATUS: Single

Donna Rose's journey to becoming an internationally known and respected workplace advocate began back in her native Chicago when in 1959 she was born as David.

Today, the 47-year-old transgender woman consults with Fortune 500 firms and is a member of the Human Rights Campaign's business council and board of directors (HRC's first and only transgender board member). While at Texas-based computer company Dell, she was instrumental in convincing the firm to amend its antidiscrimination policy to include gender identity. That earned Dell a perfect rating of 100% on HRC's Corporate Equality Index.

Rose now works to help other companies include similar protections for transgender workers. She also continues to work as an information technologies consultant, something she began doing in 1981 after getting married and settling down with her then-wife near Rochester, N.Y.

In 2000, Rose moved from her home in Scottsdale, Ariz., to Texas and took the job of senior information technologies project manager at Dell—coordinating computer hardware, software, and vendor and human resources—as a way of “starting fresh” after her sex-reassignment surgery and her marriage's disintegration. In fact, her interview with Dell was her first as Donna.

Although she made a decision not to mix

her personal and professional lives, she soon came to realize that her coworkers had become her friends. After being asked too many personal questions that forced her to not be completely honest, she told one friend “who handled it very well.” She then gradually told others.

One of the most interesting reactions came from her director, “who got nervous and ran to human resources. When I asked him why, he said that he was worried that he wouldn't know how to handle it. He said he needed to make sure that no one was harassing me.”

Dell's positive response was quite different from what she had experienced at other companies. When she started to transition in 1998, she was told flat-out by a supervisor at a pharmacy benefits management company that even though she would not be fired for being transgender, she could be. “That was a rude awakening,” says Rose.

Rose, who again lives in Scottsdale, has fostered strong relationships personally—most notably with her son—as well as professionally, helping to advance transgender interests in the workplace. “My mantra is that being transgender isn't necessarily about sex or gender. There's a more core issue of just being yourself. It's a much healthier way of looking at the issue.”



Donna Rose

Trans-Corporate America

Brian McNaught—the man who *The New York Times* named the “god-father of gay diversity training”—has launched a new series on gay and transgender workplace issues.

The DVD or VHS program, called “Understanding and Managing Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace,” consists of four half-hour segments and features McNaught educating a corporate audience about what gay and transgender people are looking for in an employer, why they want to come out at work—

and what prevents them from doing so. He also provides information on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression. McNaught also seeks to help viewers understand how their gay and transgender colleagues are personally and professionally affected in the workplace by the lack of understanding of their issues.

The program is available from TRB Productions at www.trbproductions.com or by calling (508) 487-3700. The cost is \$495 for part 1 or \$895 for the entire four-part presentation. —Chad Graham