

MY WORKPLACE TRANSITION

My Name is Nikki Anne, I am 53 years old, and my birth name was Nicholas Robert. I live in Detroit, MI USA and work for a defense contractor writing high-level repair manuals for military trucks and equipment. High-level repair manuals are used for unit overhauls such as engines, transmissions, axles etc. These manuals are used to rebuild the units back to original, like new condition. In the process of writing these manuals, I have a lot of contact with government officials including military officers. You can only imagine my fear of transitioning and of the possibility of losing my job under these conditions. By September of 2006, when I came out to my HR manager, I had worked there for over 5-1/2 years.

After years of holding and concealing my feelings of being a woman, I ended up hospitalized for major depression and suicidal feelings. The room in my head where I kept my feelings of being a woman locked up had crumbled and I just didn't have the energy or the will to lock those feelings back up. I tried for two years after that to find some way to make my feelings go away so I would not have to transition. I fought it hard. I could not hurt my wife of 20 years or my family and I was very afraid I would lose my job over this. The guilt was crushing me. It was pushing me to suicide. I thought it would be better if I were dead than to transition, there were no other choices for me. My wife, Dad, and stepmother were calling me selfish and in order to transition, I had to find a way to deal with the intense feelings of guilt I had.

One day, after much research, I ordered hormones from an internet pharmacy and began taking them. After about 6 – 8 weeks I noticed that I felt really good, as if everything was finally running inside my head the way it was supposed to. I knew it was the right thing for me then, but I needed to find a way to deal with these huge guilt feelings I had.

One day, I was searching the internet for an answer and came across a web site put up by Donna Rose. Her story was very similar to my own and I could relate the path of my life to her path very easily. On her site, I found an essay titled "Selfish" and in the essay, she asked the question; "If your family and friends try to do everything in their power to keep you from transitioning and being happy, aren't they being selfish?" That was such a strong essay and lifted the weight of the guilt that was crushing me. That essay saved my life and enabled me to finally be able to move forward with transition. I have thanked Donna for posting her great website and wonderful essay's. I have no doubt in my mind that I would be dead by now if she hadn't posted that essay. She truly saved my life!

Once I believed I could transition I began to form a plan, an outline of things I needed to do, and a timeline for doing them. I set my date for going full-time a little over a year from when I started planning. I had been in therapy for depression for almost two years, I had figured out my other problems and their causes and now I could go forward. I found a gender therapy specialist and began seeing him and we set up a treatment plan.

I had been working for my company as a direct hire employee for a little less than 4 years. After reaching the five-year mark, I would be fully vested in the company's pension plan. Even if I had lost my job for whatever reason, after that, I would still be

able to collect on that pension, I was afraid of my company's reaction to my transition so I planned my transition to begin, following my five-year direct hire anniversary date. One thing I realized was that if I was going transition at work I needed friends there and to build a support group of my coworkers. A small group of women would go walking at lunchtime weather permitting, and I thought joining them would be a good place to start. In April 2006, I asked one of the women that worked in my department if I could walk with them and she said sure.

By this time, I had already been growing my hair longer and the effects of hormones had already started showing, so many changes were becoming noticeable. I also had been wearing clear or light pink nail polish every day and sometimes an androgynous article of women's clothing such as a blouse, a pair slacks, or some women's shoes. I was accepted into their group and in no time, they were talking about things with me that women just don't talk about around men. During these walks, I would make comments like "I had a therapy appointment for that evening" and that "I was dealing with a problem from my earliest memories". Another time I said I had to wait until I had my 5 years in before I could let people know what I was doing. Little hints and clues of what I was building up to and I was certain that some of my new friends were beginning to figure out what was going on. During this time I also tried to be as helpful as possible to my fellow coworkers. Offering and volunteering to help where I could and participating with activities where I could.

My First Time Out in Public



In June of 2006, there was a pride festival in our area and I volunteered to help at the Michigan Transgender booth. I needed to begin going out in public as Nikki and what better place to start I thought than a pride festival. My hair was not very long yet, so I wore my wig, and built up the courage I needed to take that first step. It was the first time I had ventured out in daytime as Nikki and I loved every minute of it. It felt wonderful to finally be myself. After the festival, I started pushing my self more and more to do things as Nikki. When I was out shopping, I would look people in the eye and smile and they smiled back. What a wonderful feeling to have that smile of acceptance. My confidence was building higher and higher. I began going to restaurants and did things like grocery shopping and at times when I was nervous about going somewhere I would say to myself "if you can't do this then you're not ready to transition" and I would then push myself to take that first step and after that the rest came easily.

One time while grocery shopping, about a half an hour into a two hour trip, I realized I was not trying to be Nikki anymore, I was just "being" Nikki. I realized I was just being myself and it felt so natural and truly wonderful. One summer morning before work, I was fixing my hair, and while I was looking in the mirror, I suddenly realized I didn't see Nick there anymore. I only saw Nikki looking back at me and I haven't seen any signs of Nick since then. During the summer of 2006, I gained all the confidence I would need to transition. Mentally, I was ready to go full time, but I had to be patient though, there were several things I needed to do first.

After Labor Day, our company had a training class planned for the employees. It was a combination of a phone/email etiquette class and a sexual harassment class. After the class, I knew that sexual orientation and gender identity and expression were not covered by my company's harassment policy. I felt the time was right to approach the subject with my HR manager. I sent her an email asking if these things were covered in our company's policy. She replied with a copy of Title VII of the US harassment policy and said she would stop by later to ask if I had any questions. When she did come by my cubicle, she whispered, "Are you being harassed?" I told her "No", but then words just popped out of my mouth; I said, "I am not having any trouble now but that could change in the future" and told her we needed to have a talk. She said she would get back to me later. She contacted me and we set up a meeting, she asked how much time I thought I needed for the meeting and I told her it depended on how many questions she had. Yikes!, I thought, what had I done? My instincts must have said I was ready for this. I found information from the internet where other women had started out a meeting like this with their management or HR departments by preparing a letter for their managers to read first. I thought this was a good idea and copied one woman's letter that I thought was pretty good and changed pertinent information to match my own situation.

When I had my meeting with her, I gave her the three-page letter to read. After she read it, which seemed to take an hour, but was probably less than five minutes, she told me "First of all, I want to tell you that I admire your courage". I thought well this is off to a good start. Then she told me that she had been expecting to have this talk with me for sometime because she had noticed the changes I was going through, but she had to wait until I approached her first. Then she said that I was the first person in all of her years in HR that had done something like this. She told me that she would do everything she could to help my transition go smoothly. I gave my HR manager some books, printouts, and website links to help her try and understand what being transsexual was about and what transition meant, which she appreciated. She then told me that she and my manager had also noticed a big change in my attitude and personality at work over the last few months. That instead of looking at the floor when going about my business and keeping to myself, I seemed much more outgoing and I was now looking people in the eye and greeting them with a smile and a hello or how are you? After talking with her for an hour or so, she asked me if she could invite my department manager to this meeting and I said, "Yes, he will need to know sooner or later". My manager read my letter and the first thing he told me was that he admired my courage. (This was going way better than my expectations.) Then he said as long as my job performance remained on level that it was that my job was secure. The outcome of my coming out at work went so well and I was so happy I felt like I was walking on air the rest of the week.

She later notified the upper management at our facility and corporate headquarters about what I was doing. They were all OK with it and told her to figure out the next steps and develop a plan. She did an amazing amount of reading and research on this and I hold her in very high regards for all her support and effort that she put forth.

After informing my HR and Department managers, I began telling the people on my team including my immediate supervisor, the people I worked closely with, and the women I went walking with. They were all accepting and supportive and I thought it went very well. There was one woman who sat over the cubicle wall from me that

seemed OK with it at first, but then seemed to become more and more uncomfortable with it over time. She has distanced herself from me. Maybe she will adjust over time.

I did a lot of research myself and found out the average time for a name change in my county was 2-3 months so I decided to begin that process in early Jan, 2007. Also in Jan, I found a modeling school and inquired about coaching for my walk and other things I needed to learn and began every other week lessons with her. She helped my confidence even more by teaching me how to walk properly, some more feminine mannerisms, and other things like makeup and proper clothing choices.

During the winter of 2007, I continued going to support group meetings, seeing my therapist, and building a wardrobe of business casual wear to wear to my job. I also had more meetings with my HR manager to talk about things like the bathroom issue. She had found a locking door, single person bathroom in the far corner of the building and had it painted and even hung a picture from her own office in there, put a unisex sign on the door and said that I would be using this bathroom for awhile. The date to begin using the main woman's room would be left open for now. I stepped up my appearance on the job too. I began wearing makeup from time to time along with wearing more complete outfits of women's clothing once every week or two. No one at work had made any comments at all about my dress or appearance although I am sure it was noticed. I was gradually changing over to full time rather than the all-at-once, shock and awe on the first day, approach. My HR manager approved of the way I was gradually changing as she wanted to keep my transition low key and this would fit in with her plans. During one of these meetings, she informed me that my company had hired an outside consultant to help set up a diversity/harassment training class which was going to be made mandatory for all employees. We had almost 400 employees working here in my office building at the time. At the time of this posting the total was up to 470 employees) She wanted to have this training the week before I went full-time.

The end of March 2007, I had a court date for my name change. The hearing went smoothly and I bought three certified copies on the name change document. One of these I gave to my HR manager, One I filed away, and the last one I keep with me and use it to change names at places like doctors offices and other places such as that. I applied for a new social security card the next day and waited for my new card to come. I needed that card to get my Driver's license here in Michigan. I found out I could get my gender changed on my driver's license if I had a letter from my doctor stating that I have undergone the necessary treatments to become a woman. I got this letter from my doctor and went to Secretary of State Office armed with my paperwork. It all went very smoothly, I got my name, and gender changed and I was out of there in about 15 minutes. I then changed my name on my bank accounts, charge cards, trade certifications, and college records and diploma. (I have an Associates degree in Automotive Technology)

My company changed my name on all company records. They took care of changing my name and sex on my health and dental insurance too. The training came up the first week of May 2007 and it went well. After the regular employee training, they had a special meeting for all the supervisors and managers in which I was not invited. The reason I was kept out of that meeting was so people would not feel uncomfortable asking questions. During this meeting, HR and the consultant informed the people who was doing what (that I was transitioning from male to female) and then they informed the managers how to handle possible complaints or problems stemming from my

transition. Many very good questions came up and no complaints at all. It went so well that the next day people were already addressing me as Nikki. ☺

My ID Badge Photo



On May 14, 2007, I started living full-time as Nikki. Since I was already presenting myself as Nikki so much, no one really noticed any difference. It was pretty much a non-event and worked out the way my HR manager and I had hoped. I had my new ID badge picture taken and my name on my cubicle changed. It took a little longer to switch my Email address, change my name in the company's intranet phone directory, and get new business cards printed but it all went very smoothly. Coworkers started using my new name and some called me Nik. Since Nik is considered a nickname for Nikki it was not a problem. Previously everyone called me Nick and if people still referred to me by that it wouldn't be an issue for me. The only thing I would be upset about is if someone called me Nicholas, since no one called me Nicholas previously, I would consider it harassment to have someone call me that now.

After 8 months of living full-time as a woman I have become very relaxed and comfortable in my own skin. I dwell less and less on being Nikki and find it so easy to be me. For the first time in my life I feel real, normal, and natural. It is hard to describe my joy. I understand that the people I work with won't harass me because our company has made it clear that harassment will not be tolerated, but I expected that some people would be unfriendly or give me a cold shoulder treatment. That has happened with only a couple of my co-workers. So for the most part that has not materialized and in fact, I have even made some new friends and supporters.

Not all is perfect though, as I still have much sadness about what my wife is going through. This was not something she bargained for when we married 22 years ago. My Dad and Step-mom have both been non accepting and have told me I am not welcome at their home

This photo was taken by a coworker in early December, 2007 at a company Christmas party.



My youngest daughter, who is 20, had a rough time dealing with this. I am afraid that my wife will never accept this change in me but I have hopes that with time we may still be able to be friends. My daughter and I have had some long talks and before Christmas, she told me she wanted to regain our close relationship that she felt had been lost over the past few years while I was dealing with my feelings. I am excited about this. We have gone shopping together and out to eat and to the movies and she is very comfortable being out with me.

I feel I am very lucky to have most of my family, friends and co-workers acceptance and support.