The Woman Formerly Known as “<male name>”

…or…

More Details About <new first name>’s Transition

# Huh? Transition?

At birth, the doctor says, “It’s a boy!” or “It’s a girl!” For most people, the doctor’s pronouncement fits who we are as they grow and mature. However, for transgender people, like me, it doesn’t. In my case, what this means is the initial pronouncement of “It’s a boy” doesn’t fit who I am, and I’ve chosen to honor and respect my identity by transitioning from male to female in all aspects of my life – professionally, socially, legally, and medically.

I’ve reached the point where I could no longer live as a man and be both a healthy and a happy person. That’s why, working with the professionals on my transition team, I’m transitioning.

# Are you “out”?

Yes! I’m about as “out” as someone can be right now. Because gender is so pervasive in our lives, it obviously isn’t possible to keep such a major change secret – so I’ve instead embraced this part of who I am. I ask that, where possible, you treat me like you would treat any other woman in a professional setting. But, at the same time, I recognize that my transition is part of who I am, and I don’t see it as shameful, embarrassing, or something to keep secret.

# What do you look like now?

I’ve attached a fairly recent photo above.

# How should I refer to you?

Simple: **<new first name>**. When using a title, “**Ms.”** is appropriate. When using pronouns, “**she**,” “**her**,” and “**hers”** are proper. “<new first name>” is pronounced as “<pronunciation>,” rhythming with “<word>.” Feel free to ask how I pronounce it.

My full name is **<full name>**. I’ve completed the steps needed to change my name on my identity documents - for instance, my driver’s license, passport, etc. As a result of this change, my preferred name and my legal name are now the same. I’ve also changed my gender on these documents to **female**.

# What if I mess up and use the wrong name or pronouns?

From personal experience, I know that changing the pronouns and name you use can be very difficult, particularly if you have known someone for some time. Trans people, like myself, understand switching the pronouns you use for someone is difficult and involves changing established habits. So, if you mess up, I will not take it personally because I know this was not intended. I will correct people when they use the wrong name, just as you likely would if people used the wrong name to refer to you, but I won’t attribute a mistake to malice. One good way to respond is to say, “I’m sorry,” and then use the correct name or pronoun.

Should you catch yourself using the wrong pronoun or name, again, just say that you’re sorry and use the correct one. You don’t need to say you didn’t mean anything by it – I already know that.

# What about other people? What do I tell them?

For people who didn’t know me before my transition, you should introduce me as you would respectfully introduce any other female colleague.

For people who met me when I was using a male name, feel free to respectfully let them know that I am now going by “<new first name>” and am asking people to use feminine pronouns. If you don’t feel comfortable doing this, let me know, as I’m glad to explain this to them. I’m taking the effort to notify people who work with me frequently, but I’m sure I’ll miss some people (please don’t be offended if I initially missed you, it was an accidental oversight, not intentional).

# So, are you going to dress differently?

Yes, I’ll be dressing and grooming in a more stereotypically feminine manner. Of course, like all women, I bring aspects of my style with me and will dress in a way that is more stereotypically feminine but not necessarily stereotypically feminine in all aspects. Again, this is no different than any other woman.

# Are the changes I’ve seen in your appearance related to your transition?

Most likely, yes. I’ve changed several aspects of my appearance. I know people have noticed the change of hairstyle and my pierced ears, and expect people have noticed other changes to grooming. Also, I’ve undergone some medical procedures which affect my appearance, while other procedures are on-going and continue to affect my appearance. As part of becoming healthy, I’ve also lost substantial weight – which has been possible in large part because I’m now feeling a lot more comfortable in my body, so I can also now focus on other aspects of my health.

Unlike reality shows may lead people to believe, a medical transition can take years, and the transitioning person will still retain some aspects of her before-transition appearance. Thus, you can expect to see continued changes in my appearance, but they will essentially continue at the same rate you’ve seen over the last year or two.

Over the last year, I’ve also been expressing my gender more fully outside of work, and despite attempts to disguise much of this, I’m sure some of that has come through in my interactions and style at work.

# Have you had surgery?

Most trans people consider this question impolite, as it is essentially asking about the appearance of a trans person’s genitals. In addition, the medical process a trans person might go through is individualized and unique to each person, and even what most people think of as “the surgery” is really several surgical procedures, and those procedures are but one step of a medical transition for someone for whom surgery is appropriate. For these reasons, I will not discuss this aspect of my transition.

Most medical professionals follow the World Professional Association for Transgender Health’s *Standards of Care*. This document is available online for those who are curious about the medical aspects of gender transition:

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/amo_hub_content/Association140/files/Standards%20of%20Care%20V7%20-%202011%20WPATH%20(2)(1).pdf>

# Some Terms

While I won’t spend a lot of time defining different terms, some terms I use may be unfamiliar to others. Some common ones I use are:

**Sex**: This is the biology. Sex includes, for instance, chromosomes and body parts, and is what the doctor announces during the birth of a boy or girl is noting when she says, “It’s a girl!”

**Gender**: This is distinct from sex in that the brain and body may not always agree. A shorthand here is that gender is “what is between your ears.”

**Trans**: short for all types of transgender people including people who transition medically, people who transition socially, and others who may express gender in ways that aren’t typical

**Trans Woman**: a trans person who is a woman – that is, someone like myself.

I’ll call myself trans or a trans woman. Different trans people may have different preferences, but I consider these labels respectful and accurate for me, and I am not upset if someone uses them to describe me respectfully.

Some terms to never use of another person (you may occasionally hear people refer to themselves with these terms, but, trust me, most of us would not feel good about it if you used them of us): tranny, transvestite, she-male, etc.

# How can I help you?

The best way you can help is to continue to work with me as you have over the course of my employment at <company>. While support in other ways is always appreciated, I am most interested in continuing to perform my job well at work.

I, of course, appreciate messages of support and any help you feel comfortable providing to help co-workers get used to the new name and pronouns.

# Will this impact your job performance?

**YES!**

That’s probably not the answer you expected, so I’ll explain. It takes a tremendous amount of energy to pretend to be someone you are not – in my case, to pretend to be a man. That’s energy that could be used to do my job better instead.

I believe I’ve gained a lot of perspective from my experience in transition. A gender transiton is an extremely involved and complex project management exercise – and I can say it has, out of necessity, improved my project management skills!

I’m also not the first trans woman to work in technology – in fact, some of the biggest innovations in technology are a result, at least in part, of transwomen approaching a problem differently than others might. In particular, I’ll note two transwomen who have made major contributions to computing, although these are not the only two to have done so.

## Lynn Conway

Ms. Conway was instrumental in developing the concept of dynamic instruction scheduling while working for IBM in the 1960s. The techniques she developed are still used today in modern processor designs. Sadly, IBM fired her when she disclosed that she intended to transition and she was forced to, essentially, restart her career from the beginning after her transition. Remarkably, she did manage to restart her career. After her transition, she literally wrote the book on VLSI design, and it would be hard to imagine modern computing without her work.

## Sophie Wilson

Sophie was one of the original team members designing the Acorn BBC Microcomputer. While her work on the BBC computer, particularly with BBC Basic, would be remarkable without any further achievement, she went on to develop the ARM instruction set, still used today. Her instruction set had some wonderful properties – it is expressive while allowing highly power-efficient hardware implementations of the instruction set. For that reason, the ARM processor is used in more and more devices today. Most office workers today probably have half a dozen ARM-based devices within reach.

# I have other questions, or I want to talk to you about this.

I am proud of who I am as a trans woman, and am happy to discuss this with you – let me know, and we can drink a cup of coffee or eat lunch together at the cafeteria if you are in <location>. I’m happy to answer your questions and share my experiences.

Also, I want to note that if you or a loved one is trans, I am especially happy to support you in any way I can – including talking about my experiences in my transition process and providing resources that may be available. I’ve been very fortunate in having the help of some trans-sisters who allowed me to learn from their experiences.