

International Non-Binary People's Day

By Jae Mikalik (they/them/theirs), Junior Salesforce Administrator and DEI Champion
Pittsburgh Campus

International Non-Binary People's Day is this month on the 14th, and it was first celebrated in 2012. The date was chosen for being precisely between International Men's Day and International Women's Day, the two sides of the "gender binary." This day is aimed at raising awareness and organizing around the issues faced by non-binary people around the world. Non-binary is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity falls outside the binary of man or woman. People under this umbrella may or may not identify as trans and they may partially identify with man or woman, but they don't exclusively identify as one of those genders.



There are many famous people in recent years coming out with this identity as it becomes more accepted. A great example of this is the comedian, Eddie Izzard. She identifies with a non-binary gender called genderfluid and calls herself "somewhat boy-ish and somewhat girl-ish" but has also requested specifically she/her pronouns. This highlights why providing



Eddie Izzard, February 2022

your pronouns is so important; so people are welcome to share theirs. As a nonbinary person myself that identifies as genderfluid just like Eddie, I prefer they/them pronouns. Even though we have the same gender and even describe it the same way, we have different pronoun preferences. These preferences can even evolve over time as originally

Eddie said she preferred he/him pronouns while in "boy-mode" and she/her pronouns while in "girl-mode." These terms are typically used when non-binary or trans people dress in a gender-conforming way to be perceived as that binary gender. They may do this because that's the gender they are feeling closest to on a particular day or they may do this to mask themselves when they are around people they are not out to.

Unless someone has explained these modes for using pronouns or expressed a specific pronoun they'd like you to use, "they/them" pronouns are the best choice for non-binary persons and persons you don't know the gender of. As a gender-neutral pronoun, the singular "they" really covers a lot of bases!

While my experience in our workplace has been a generally positive one, the National Transgender Discrimination Survey (conducted in 2008-2009) shows almost all non-binary

people had experienced discrimination in the workplace. Their findings at the time showed that being out as a non-binary person at work could negatively affect that person's employment outcomes. Though non-binary people have higher unemployment rates than those who identify with a specified gender, masculine non-binary people who still appear male, or are not "passing as female" generally have a harder time in the work environment. Within the non-binary community, this is part of a bias that we see often as many people see non-binary as "woman-lite" and do not recognize AMAB (assigned male at birth) members of the community in as welcoming ways. They are planning a new survey this year that I have signed up for and I hope to see many positive strides in this survey, just like I have seen in our workplace.



What can I do to step up as an ally to non-binary people?

There are many ways to be inclusive of everyone, regardless of their gender identity. Our dialect and the way we address is often embedded with hidden gendered cues.

Once we start to notice these gendered terms, we can move towards using language that's inclusive for all. Here are 10 tips you can start using right away!

1. Introduce yourself with your name and pronoun. Stating your pronouns reminds people that it might not always be immediately obvious what pronoun someone uses.
2. Add your pronouns in your email signature, video call name, or social media profile.

3. Instead of addressing groups of people with binary language such as 'ladies and gentlemen,' try more inclusive alternatives such as 'folks,' 'pals,' 'all,' 'colleagues,' or 'everyone.'
4. Use words that define the relationship instead of the relationship and gender. For example, use 'parents,' 'partner,' 'children,' or 'siblings.'
5. Not everyone is comfortable with gendered titles such as 'Ms.' or 'Mr.' Titles are not always necessary, but if they must be used it's good to provide alternative ones such as 'Mx.' (pronounced mix or mux). Just like pronouns, it's always best to ask! I prefer sir and don't like Ms., Mr. or Mx., while many others don't like sir or ma'am.
6. Use the singular 'their' instead of 'his/her' in letters and other forms of writing, i.e. 'when a colleague finishes their work' as opposed to 'when a colleague finishes his/her work.'
7. Not everyone necessarily uses 'he' or 'she' pronouns and it's important to be respectful of people who use different pronouns. The most common gender-neutral pronoun is the singular 'they' (they/them/theirs). Using people's correct pronouns shows that you respect them and who they are.
8. Using the pronoun 'they' is very useful when someone's gender or identity is unknown. You will often already be using it without realizing, i.e. 'somebody left their hat, I wonder if they will come back to get it.'
9. Make sure that your policies and documents use inclusive language, i.e. using 'they' instead of 'he/she' and avoiding sentences that imply two genders. Where specifically talking about gender identity, make sure it is inclusive of non-binary gender identities and not just trans men and trans women.
10. When highlighting LGBTQIA+ people in your events or as role models, make sure you include some non-binary role models too! Some great examples are Johnathan Van Ness (he/him but uses other pronouns interchangeably) from Queer Eye; Jeffrey Marsh (they/them) an activist of many trades that was the first non-binary bridal model; and Janelle Monáe (they/them, she/her) an innovator in Afrofuturism through their music, sci-fi writing, and acting careers.

It may take a bit of getting used to but being mindful of the pronouns and language we're using causes you no harm and it will help other people feel acknowledged and valid.

Additional Resources:

[Celebrating the Diversity of the Non-Binary Community for International Non-Binary Day 2020](#)

[International Non-Binary Day 2021: Interviews with three of HRC's Youth Ambassadors](#)

[When "Ma'am" and "Sir" Just Don't Work? Help! : Gender Neutral and Nonbinary-Exclusive Language; A Small Guide](#)

[The history of non-binary genders is longer than you know](#)