

THE OPTIONS BOOKSHELF

MYRA SHAYS

BUYING FOR EQUALITY

When we spend our hard-earned dollars, we'd like to give our business to companies that are fair to their gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees -- right? That's now easier than ever, because the latest issue of Buying for Equality is out, rating hundreds of companies on their gay-friendly (or not so gay-friendly) policies, using a 100-point scale. The guide is produced each year by the Human Rights Campaign, the nation's largest organization working for equal rights for gays, and some of it may surprise you.

For instance, in the Apparel category: The Gap, JC Penney, and Macy's scored 100; but L.L. Bean scored only 73. In the "Filling the Tank" category, Chevron scored 100 and Exxon Mobil zero. Many food and beverage companies rated perfect scores, such as Coke, Pepsi, Coors, Kraft and Starbucks, but Kellogg's scored only 35. When buying household supplies, consider that Clorox scored 100 but Colgate-Palmolive only 58.

It won't surprise many of us that Cracker Barrel Restaurants scored 35.

The preface to the guide says that whenever you buy a book or a cup of coffee, fill your gas tank or plan a vacation, you're voting with your dollars. There has been a revolution in the workplace. Companies realize what tremendous buying power the LGBT community has, and increasingly they are granting domestic-partner benefits to their gay employees, including gays in diversity training and non-discrimination policies, and advertising in gay-oriented publications. The number of companies scoring 100 on the Corporate Equality Index rose last year from 138 to 175, a record number.

To download the latest Buying for Equality Guide, visit www.hrc.org/buyersguide, or call (800)777-4273 for a mailed copy.

NEW GUIDE FOR COMING OUT AS TRANSGENDER

There's a ground-breaking new resource guide, Coming Out as Transgender, from the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) and the Human Rights Campaign. It offers step-by-step guidance in talking with friends, co-workers and family about being transgender, in both print and online versions.

"I wish a resource like this had been available when I was coming out," said Mara

Keisling, executive director of NCTE. "Talking with the people in your life about being transgender is deeply personal



journey; this resource will help point the way." To obtain the guide, or to receive more information, visit www.NCTEquality.org or www.HRC.org.

THE PERSONAL STORY OF A TRANSGENDER TEEN

An inspiring new book is Mom, I Need to be a Girl, written by the mother of four boys whose youngest told her at the age of 14 that he was miserable being a boy. The mother never doubted this, because from a very young age the child had shown feminine physical and emotional characteristics. You will admire the tenacity and resourcefulness of this low-income divorced mother as she battled schools, insensitive mental health counselors, the medical establishment, the child's father, and the ever-present specter of poverty to shepherd Danielle through the years-long process of transitioning to her authentic gender. The experience turned the mother, "Just Evelyn," into a widely known and respected activist for transgender children and teens, and a founder of a national organization, TransYouth Family Advocates. Photos of Danielle are in the book.

THE SURVIVAL GUIDE TO "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL"

Some of what you think you know about "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" may be just myth. And there are truths you may be unaware of that may be crucially important to anyone you know in the military -- gay or straight.

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network has published its latest update of a 74- page book, The Survival Guide to "Don't

Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Harass." DADT is the legal ban on lesbians, gays and bisexuals serving in the military -- similar to the policies banning service that had been in place for the previous 50 years. It is the only law in the land that authorizes the firing of an American for being gay. There is no other federal, state or local law like it. An honest statement of a service member's sexual orientation to anyone, anywhere, anytime -- even if not related to military service and made outside of the workplace -- may lead to discharge. The Guide stresses, however, that personnel have certain legal rights under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, and that, if questioned about their personal lives, they should say nothing, sign nothing, and get legal help.

It is the only law in the land that authorizes the firing of an American for being gay.

The book is user-friendly, written in layperson's language, and backed up with references to regulations, codes and case law. Some of the information is set out in easily grasped, terse lists. For example, there is a list of people to whom DADT applies: Yes to active duty, service academies, National Guard, and three other categories. No to veterans, Civilian Air Patrol, transgender people, and seven other categories. The Guide contains an exhaustive list of sources for free legal help, as well as general resources: gay veterans' groups and political, spiritual, health and family resources, among many others.

Gay servicemembers with DADT issues are advised to seek legal counsel before agree in to waive any legal rights, and to ensure that any attorney they consult is a defense attorney. The Guide cautions, however, that there are limited circumstances in which their conversations with an attorney may not be held confidential.

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network is a national, non-profit legal services, watchdog and policy organization dedicated to ending discrimination against and harassment of military personnel affected by DADT and related forms of intolerance. Since 1994 it has responded to over 8,300 requests for assistance. SLDN's services are confidential and free, though contributions are welcome.

To obtain a free copy of the guide, visit www.sldn.org or email legal@sldn.org . ▼