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BUSINESS

Stanford Announces 'Boot Camp' for Gay Business Leaders

Stanford University's Graduate School of Business will offer LGBT leadership program in late July



Stanford University's weeklong boot camp, hailed as the first of its kind at the university level, will cater to midcareer leaders who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. *PHOTO: BECK DIEFENBACH/REUTERS*

By **GEORGIA WELLS**

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STANFORD, Calif.—Stanford University's business school is offering a leadership program intended to help more gay leaders ascend to the C-suite.

The Graduate School of Business will hold the first Stanford LGBT Executive Leadership Program in late July. The weeklong boot camp, hailed as the first of its kind at the university level, will cater to midcareer leaders who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

Participants will undergo personal leadership assessments and get management training—a condensed version of the school’s popular “Acting With Power” course, as well as instruction in design thinking, according to the program’s directors, professor Sarah Soule and lecturer Thomas Wurster. The course will also address topics like authentic leadership and being open about sexuality at work, often thorny workplace issues for gay managers.

Drs. Soule and Wurster initially set out to find a way the business school could advance LGBT business leaders. They canvassed executives and human-resources managers, who said they wanted executive-training offerings for gay managers, said Dr. Wurster, a former senior partner at management-consulting firm Boston Consulting Group, where he co-founded the organization’s LGBT network. Companies can nominate employees to apply for the roughly 50 slots in the program, and individuals can also apply. Tuition will be about \$12,000 and the ideal candidate, the faculty say, has about 10 years of professional experience and five years of management experience

“We’re at an inflection point. Companies are moving quickly to build out diversity in their leadership teams, but we’ve seen relatively few senior executives who are LGBT and out,” Dr. Wurster said.

Employers have grown more accommodating of employees who identify as LGBT recently, with employee-resource groups and inclusive benefits policies. Yet Apple Inc. Chief Executive Tim Cook, who publicly came out years after he was named chief executive, is believed to be the only openly gay CEO among the Fortune 500 list of top U.S. companies.

Joel Simkhai, CEO of Grindr LLC, a gay-dating app, attributes some of his success to his network of LGBT professionals, and says the networking and mentoring in Stanford’s program could benefit other business leaders.

“When I was coming out 20 years ago, there weren’t any openly gay business executives as role models,” Mr. Simkhai says. “One of my biggest fears was that I wouldn’t be successful, that there would be no career opportunities for me and that I would live a life of stereotypes.”

Matt MacInnis, chief executive of Inkling, an enterprise-content platform, has been openly gay since ninth grade. Still, he says he struggled with these issues while pitching his startup to investors. One asked Mr. MacInnis, who had recently married his husband and wears a wedding band, about his wife. The CEO chose not to correct the investor, in case the revelation jeopardized the potential deal.

Having to agonize over what to say in such situations “translates in business into a lack of confidence,” he says. Having a dedicated program and time to work through how to be both an authentic leader and an openly gay one could help other leaders excel, he said.

Stanford is introducing two other new programs for executives this year; one for health care leaders and another aimed at helping executives navigate government relations.

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