

“Truth is powerful and it prevails.”

– Sojourner Truth

There’s nothing stranger than the truth. Growing up in the Deep South, I learned to hide my strange truth, so that I could be accepted into the prized ranks of normal. I created a character of myself, with a performative interest in traditionally masculine activities and traditionally feminine bodies. My character was very “professional”: he embodied all the comfortably expected behaviors of a male professional that I thought would be the key to my success. I put enormous effort into playing my character and strived to embody him as convincingly as possible. He had a mask for every stage, including the workplace.

What I discovered, or perhaps knew all along, was that staying in character took all the effort I had. I didn’t develop myself personally or strive professionally when I was playing the part of someone else. I gave everything to the ideal of professionalism, that great signifier of power and potential, and in the process lessened both.

The truth of professionalism is that, often, it too is a mask. So much of what constitutes the idea of professionalism, and even professional competence, is just the homeostasis of a certain type of professional. There are few objective definitions of professionalism that aren’t rooted in traditional masculinity. As a result, queer people like me spend our emotional and cognitive capital in pursuit of another identity, instead of our own workplace competence and career success.

When queer people are forced to create a second self, the true self is deeply neglected. Something is lost in the translation – the profound value of the whole person fades behind the façade. I understand the difficulty of taking off the mask and embracing (and even celebrating) the truth. More deeply, though, I understand the profound importance of that journey in reaching one’s full potential in the workplace.

I am not the comfortable expectation of masculinity. My strange, beautiful identity is decorated with the ornamentation of femininity and fortified by the deep strength of someone who survived the character that once consumed them. I will contribute my understanding, my innate empathy for others on the same journey, and my authenticity of self to my community at Columbia Business School and to my future workplace.

What I stand to gain at Columbia is equally as important – an environment and experiences wherein my authentic identity can thrive into the best leader possible. My MBA experience will allow me to learn from others who have perhaps worn different types of masks in the course of their careers. Understanding their truth is just as important as understanding my own, especially in my development as a leader who is aware and considerate of the needs and aspirations of others.

Because the truth set me free, my greatest ambition as a leader is to empower those around me to embrace their own truths, bring their authentic and whole selves to work each day, and be set free by a corporate environment that shows no preference for identity – but rather for values and ethics.

Sample of related activities:

Activity	Description	Length	Position
EY Unity Committee	Lead within LGBT professional group for EY employees, providing resources for development and engagement in the wider community	August 2018 – Present	Lead organizer for programming and recruiting in National Capital region
North American Stewardship Committee for LGBT Corporate Giving (Accenture)	Organized committee of >15 managing directors to coordinate >\$15M gift to the Human Rights Campaign across the North American market	February 2016 – August 2018	Head Organizer
Smithsonian Art Museums	Volunteer as a docent, gallery guide, lecturer, and curatorial assistant, focusing on queer art and artists	August 2016 – Present	Docent & Volunteer
British & Canadian/Quebecois Contingent in Atlanta Pride Parade & Festival	Co-organize the annual participation and fundraising activities for the British Consulate-General in Atlanta	January 2015 – Present	Organizer & Activist
Dignity DC/USA	Advocate parochially and nationally with LGBT Catholic community for progress towards queer liberation within the Church via Dignity USA and diocesan charities	August 2018 – Present	Lay Advocate & Activist
Student Government Association Vice President	Established first LGBT Resource Center at Georgia Tech as member of Student Government Executive Cabinet	August 2013 – May 2014	Vice President