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Two Different Generations. Two Different Paths. One Shared Bond.

By Tony Khing | October 23, 2013

October is LGBT History Month. It was founded by a Missouri high school teacher and first celebrated in 1994. Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) has a long history of supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees. The following story describes how two gay employees, from two different generations, have found PG&E to be a great place to work.

One grew up in the suburbs of Buffalo, N.Y. and was always known as the “gay guy” at his job. Few people knew the other person was gay until one of his co-workers saw him and his partner on a television newscast in the early 1990s registering as domestic partners.

The New Yorker came out in 2000, a time of more acceptance. The other's identity slowly came out through the 1980s and early 1990s when LGBT civil rights protections were limited.

But **Michael Kaufmann**, a customer relationship manager, and **Eric Hsu**, a senior quantitative analyst, have thrived in their roles at PG&E.

“It’s just a great company to work for,” said the 27-year-old Kaufmann. “When I think of PG&E, I think of people coming together and sharing their diverse experiences. It sounds hokey, but I think it’s true. The company has an emphasis on diversity that’s proven. I stay here because I feel very comfortable as an LGBT employee.”

“There’s so much personal mental energy that goes into being closeted and having to constantly think about what you’re going to say and who you say it to,” said Hsu, a 30-plus year PG&E employee. “All of that wasted energy is gone. I can devote that energy



Eric Hsu (left) and Michael Kaufmann (right) have benefited from PG&E's emphasis on diversity and inclusion.

to being a more productive employee.”

PG&E’s emphasis on diversity and inclusion has made a difference in Kaufmann’s and Hsu’s working experience. A big factor has been the PrideNetwork Employee Resource Group (ERG), which debuted more than 25 years ago and was one of the nation’s first corporate LGBT groups.

Kaufmann, who became a full-time PG&E employee in 2011, particularly liked the PrideNetwork’s “I’m an Ally” campaign which featured PG&E officers on posters showing they were allies to the company’s LGBT employees.

“That really promoted an environment of welcoming and acceptance,” said Kaufmann.

“When I started, there was no PrideNetwork,” said Hsu. “I didn’t know any other gay or lesbian employees. I felt very isolated. I didn’t feel like I had any support.”

However, a few years after the PrideNetwork was formed, Hsu not only had a support group, but an organization that pushed for significant company policy modifications to help him and others in his situation.

“My partner and I were trying to refinance our house in the early 1990s,” said Hsu. “We went to get a loan from the Pacific Service Credit Union. At that time, their membership policies prohibited us from getting a joint mortgage through them. He couldn’t be a member under the rules. PrideNetwork supported me in going to the credit union board and pointed out this was discriminatory.”

Thanks to the PrideNetwork, Hsu and his now spouse (documentary film maker James Chambers, who made “Citizen Change,” a movie about the development of the world’s first domestic partners policy) got the membership rules changed. Not to mention getting the loan. Thanks to the PrideNetwork and PG&E’s policies, LGBT employees like Kaufmann and Hsu can thrive and help PG&E succeed.

“Things have changed at PG&E like they have in society,” said Hsu. “People have become much more aware, accepting and supportive over those decades.”

“When I worked in Buffalo, I was the only gay person there,” said Kaufmann. “I felt very alienated. At PG&E, it’s never been an issue. It’s never come up for me. It’s not my unique identifier. I can just be Michael Kaufmann, the person, and not that gay guy.”

The PrideNetwork is one of PG&E’s 11 ERGs. These groups have a three-fold purpose:

- *To encourage employee excellence and teamwork*
- *To help create an environment that values and respects the diversity of the workforce*
- *To promote positive relationships in the communities PG&E serves.*

Membership in any of the ERGs is open to all employees. Visit the [ERG link](#) on PGE@Work to get more information.