

Bitesized Belonging: How do you recover from misgendering someone?

It's inevitable. You've done the self-education, you've worked on your allyship self-inventory, only to then flub someone's pronouns.

Look, it happens! Most folks understand the occasional misstep happens on our journey to be better, and are willing to extend grace to our mistakes. But only when we recover the right way! It's important to keep in mind that for trans, non-binary, and other folks whose pronouns might not be as apparent, in a single day they probably have to correct many people. That can get exhausting. So the last thing they typically want to hear is your life story and declarations about what a great ally you are.

So then what the heck are you supposed to say?

When you misgender someone, stay calm and remember to **PAARM**:

Pause: Take a breath after someone tells you you've messed up their pronouns. Breathe. Process the information. This is where folks get flustered and tend to word-vomit.

Apologize: A simple "sorry" or "my bad" goes a long way. It shows someone you heard their critique and are empathetic.

Appreciate: "Thanks for correcting me" is another way to demonstrate empathy and reinforce with the individual that you're being receptive to their correction.

Repeat: Restate whatever you just said with the correct pronouns. This gives you the chance to a) show you're actively working to ensure you don't misgender that person again and b) sneaks in a little practice to help memorization.

Move-on: Don't linger on the subject, apologize endlessly, or try to explain what a good person you are. It's okay to keep things simple and short.

Let's look at how we might use the PAARM Method during the workday:

Jack: "Hey, Ace. Amazing work on that account, man. The boss was telling me you did an awesome job and he wants you to be his number one point man moving forward".

Ace: "Oh, really!? That's so cool. Oh, I actually go by them/them though."

Jack: (3-5 second deep breath/processing). Oh, my bad. Thanks for telling me. Amazing work on that account. The boss said you did an awesome job and he wants you leading the account moving forward. Do you have a minute to talk about this other report?"

Notice how this exchange was respectful, sincere, and short? It doesn't take much to hold ourselves accountable. But when we do, we continue enforcing basic human decency and demonstrate compassion. Those are the elements that foster true belonging.

Here's another example:

Max: Jude told me he sent over the files but I can't find anything from him? Do you know if we're having a computer issue, Alex?

Jude: Oh, I actually use she/they pronouns.

Max: (Pause). Oh, sorry about that, Jude. Thanks for making sure to correct me. Jude said she sent over the files but I can't find anything from her? Do you know if we're having computer issues, Alex?