



## Q&A

# Spotlight on SPECTRUM & Allies

June 2022

*SPECTRUM & Allies is a Conning Holdings Limited (Conning) employee resource group (ERG) created in 2021 to positively influence our work culture and ensure professional development for all members of the LGBTQIA+ community, while supporting the firm in achieving its diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) goals.*

*Odette Morin, a member of Conning's DEI Council, recently spoke about SPECTRUM & Allies with Greg Nickett, Britny Fowler, Gedy Maldonado and David Weiss, founding members of the ERG.*

### 1. **Odette: Why was it important to create SPECTRUM & Allies?**

**Gedy:** Representation is important. It is important to feel like you are not alone and to feel validated in the world. SPECTRUM & Allies serves multiple purposes, in my eyes. The first is to create a safe space for people who are in the LGBTQIA+ community and work in our company. The next is to work with allies who want to help create a work environment that fosters inclusion and build their skillset so that they can ally effectively. Another purpose is to create awareness. Sharing stories may help others in our company understand people in the LGBTQIA+ community on a human level. It was important to create SPECTRUM & Allies so we can have the tough conversations that will make our company and our bond as coworkers better.

### 2. **Odette: How can SPECTRUM & Allies make an impact in the workplace?**

**Greg:** Some LGBTQIA+ employees and job candidates want to be assured that Conning is a place where they can thrive and where others will support them. They might also need support during the process of coming out to others, or assisting connections who are coming out. Alternatively, there are some employees that may have an LGBTQIA+ family member, friend, acquaintance, co-worker, client or vendor, and we can help these employees learn how to support their LGBTQIA+ connections.

We look forward to partnering with the DEI Council and other ERGs such as the Women's Initiative Network (WIN) and the Young Professionals (YP) to expand the job candidate pool and for internal promotions at Conning. We hope to provide more events and learning opportunities for all employees and want to continue to be a resource for other departments who might need advice on how to proceed on issues such as using pronouns to introduce ourselves to others.

**Britny:** SPECTRUM & Allies can make an impact in many ways. This ERG can help employees feel valued, wanted, and safe to be themselves. Increasingly, new talent is looking for ways that companies are making efforts on diversity-related fronts, so having this group can help attract and retain valuable talent within the organization. This group can also make an impact through education and social opportunities for everyone within Conning.

3. **Odette: *What has SPECTRUM & Allies accomplished so far?***

**Gedy:** SPECTRUM & Allies has started bringing topics into the company that make people uncomfortable, topics that may be considered taboo. Our ERG is challenging everyone to open up their hearts and minds to what they may not understand in order to have empathy and understanding for each other. I hope that our ERG has also helped some people at Conning feel more welcome, included and supported. This past April, SPECTRUM & Allies hosted a company-wide panel that covered topics such as inclusion and being authentic in the workplace, and how management can help foster inclusion within their departments. SPECTRUM & Allies aims to empower those who have previously been excluded or those who have felt that being open about who they are may limit their professional growth. We hope to get more connected and involved in our communities and continue growing and learning.

4. **Odette: *What would SPECTRUM & Allies like to accomplish in the future?***

**Greg:** We aspire to continue to form relationships and become more engaged with community groups such as Out & Equal, PFLAG, The Trevor Project, GLSEN and local Pride celebrations in the cities and towns where we work. SPECTRUM & Allies members can volunteer their time and resources in roles such as mentoring LGBTQIA+ students. We look forward to sharing ERG success stories with other companies who have joined initiatives such as *CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion*, and to identify areas for improvement.

***“Representation is important. It is important to feel like you are not alone and to feel validated in the world.” -Gedy Maldonado***

5. **Odette: *What makes a good ally to the LGBTQIA+ community?***

**Britny:** A good ally is not something you are, but rather something you do and the actions one takes every day. An ally to any marginalized community, not just the LGBTQIA+ community, is one who consistently seeks to learn and grow, who uplifts the voices of members of marginalized groups, and who steps in the middle when they see an injustice/discriminatory action occurring. Examples can include things like speaking up when witnessing someone use language that can be harmful to a marginalized community. An ally is also someone that a member of a marginalized group feels comfortable telling, “hey, this particular thing you did made me feel uncomfortable/unsafe/unwelcome,” whereas they might not feel like they can say that to someone who is not an ally because it would make the situation worse and put them in a potentially greater unsafe situation.

**David:** Allies to this community need to keep in mind that, unlike many other underrepresented groups, often it’s not always obvious who likely is or isn’t a member of the LGBTQIA+ community from appearances alone. Many aren’t “out,” or are not “out” at work. So, a good ally should not make assumptions about gender or sexual orientation. A person can choose to tell you, but don’t ask. There are many letters in LGBTQIA so it represents a broad range of groups. While having some common themes, these groups each have unique gender identities and sexual orientations.

6. **Odette: *What are some other things a good ally should keep in mind?***

**David:** Allies should use gender-neutral pronouns unless you know a person’s pronouns. That’s why it’s important to normalize the exchange of pronouns when meeting new people by offering your pronouns. You don’t want to create situations where a member of the LGBTQIA+ community who isn’t out would be made uncomfortable. Something as seemingly innocuous as asking a woman if she has a boyfriend or husband introduces the assumption of heterosexuality.

Coming out can be very difficult for members of the LGBTQIA+ community. You can't assume that being out in one context, such as with family, with friends, or with co-workers, means being out in the other contexts. Understand this, empathize with this, and, whatever you do, don't "out" someone.

#### 7. *Odette: How can a group like SPECTRUM & Allies help CHL employees?*

**David:** Allowing allies to attend SPECTRUM meetings and events is important, not only for allies to offer support but also to allow members of the community who aren't out at work to participate. Some people may choose to out themselves within SPECTRUM but not more broadly at CHL. SPECTRUM is designed to be a safe space.

While SPECTRUM & Allies provides educational events, employees should not assume that members of the LGBTQIA+ community are here to educate them about LGBTQIA+ issues. If you attend SPECTRUM meetings as an ally, remember the meetings aren't about you, for you, or to educate you. That said, joining SPECTRUM as an ally will certainly be educational. Allies should be good listeners; they don't interrupt when people are speaking and really listen to them when they are speaking. Don't assume that just because you "have a good heart" that your words and actions aren't harmful to members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Because unless you've worked very hard at it, you're probably guilty of microaggressions, and these really add up. And don't assume that CHL is a place that is welcoming to members of the LGBTQIA+ community, because it can be challenging for some underrepresented groups. The role of being an ally, and one of the goals of CHL's DEI efforts, is to change this.

#### 8. *Odette: Any final advice to CHL employees about how to improve our workplace for LGBTQIA+ employees?*

**David:** As with being an ally to any underrepresented or marginalized group, employees should speak up when they see someone consciously or unconsciously say something that is a microaggression or demeaning behavior. While obviously applying to a different group, I like the quote by Angela Davis: "In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist." And maybe that sentiment really hits the nail on the head. To be a good ally means educating oneself, looking carefully at one's own behavior, and actively working to make CHL, and the world at large, a better place for members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and indeed all marginalized groups.

Remember that being gay or trans or otherwise part of the LGBTQIA+ isn't a choice and there's nothing abnormal about it. Members of the LGBTQIA+ community are a minority of the world's population, with similar numbers to the number of blue-eyed people. It's all just part of the natural diversity that is the human race - something to be celebrated.

If you are a true ally and are willing to work hard to be one, your efforts will be greatly appreciated. If you make a mistake and recognize it, correct yourself and move on without dwelling on it. I grew up saying "hi guys" to mixed gender groups of people and I've been working to eliminate that phrase from my vocabulary - for probably a decade or more now.

Remember, having good intentions isn't enough. Being a good ally is real work, it is hard. But I believe, as a matter of human decency, we all ought to put in the work. That work is rewarded and is rewarding.

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Click [here](#) to learn more about Conning's ongoing DEI efforts or visit [www.conning.com/about-us/dei](http://www.conning.com/about-us/dei).

## Interviewer:



**Odette Morin** (she/her) is a director and Head of Sales Operations, where she is responsible for all aspects of sales operations including RFPs and database management. Prior to joining Conning in 2008, Ms. Morin was employed as a client team specialist at PricewaterhouseCoopers and spent six years at Advest as an Associate Marketing Consultant. She earned her BA in management at the University of Saint Joseph.

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## Panel:



**Britny Fowler** (they/their) is a senior associate in IT Infrastructure. Mx. Fowler is currently pursuing their bachelor's in Computer Information Systems with a concentration in Cyber Security from Albertus Magnus. They also serve as a member of CHL's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Council and are one of the members of the SPECTRUM & Allies ERG for CHL. Prior to starting at Conning in 2019 they were an IT Helpdesk Technician for Nutmeg Consulting in Hartford.



**Gedaliz Maldonado** (she/her/they/their) is a Senior Associate in CHL's Infrastructure department. She works alongside her team on projects to maintain the company's technology up to date, secure, and running smoothly. Prior to working at CHL, Gedy worked at AlphaGraphics as a Graphic Designer, large format printer, web-to print storefront developer and jack-of-all-trades supporting the company's technology needs. She earned her Bachelors in technology from University of Phoenix and is currently pursuing her Masters of Information Systems with a focus on security.



**Greg Nickett** (he/his) is Vice President, Human Resources at Conning where he is part of the global human resources team, responsible for diversity/equity/inclusion, staffing and recruiting, career development, and employee relations. Prior to joining Conning in 2011, Mr. Nickett was employed by Ahlstrom and Travelers Insurance. Mr. Nickett completed his undergraduate degree at Syracuse University and his MBA at Baruch College, City University of New York. His professional designations include Professional in Human Resources (PHR) and Certified Compensation Professional (CCP).



**David Weiss** (they/their) is a Managing Director and the Head of Software Development for Risk Solutions at Conning and is the chief architect of Conning's commercial software products. Prior to joining Conning in 2010, Mr. Weiss was the Chief Technology Officer of DFA Capital Management, an enterprise risk management software company he co-founded in 1999. Previously, they were a Senior Vice President and Head of Technology for Finance & Investments of the Zurich Financial Services Group, where they were responsible for the creation of a global investments data warehouse, a global catastrophe risk analysis system, and technology integration of asset management activities. Prior to that, Mr. Weiss was Managing Director, Chief Technology Officer and head of the Operations and Technology division of UBS's Americas region and spent twelve years at Morgan Stanley where they had numerous roles including Head of Technology for the Worldwide Fixed Income Division. Mr. Weiss is a graduate of Harvard University with an AB in Economics and has 42 years of industry experience.

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