

SELISSE BERRY

b. 1956

WORKPLACE PIONEER

**Selisse Berry
is the founder
and CEO of Out &
Equal Workplace
Advocates.**

*“There are emotional and financial
benefits to being authentic.”*

Selisse Berry is the founder and CEO of Out & Equal Workplace Advocates. Based in San Francisco and Washington, D.C., it is the world's largest nonprofit organization dedicated to LGBT employment equality.

Born in Stillwater, Oklahoma, Berry was raised Presbyterian. She attended the University of North Texas and received degrees in education and guidance counseling. She earned a graduate degree in special education from the University of Texas.

For years Berry worked as a guidance counselor and teacher. In 1987 she enrolled at the San Francisco Theological Seminary. There she began dating a female classmate. Because the church did not allow gay or lesbian people to become ordained ministers, the couple kept their relationship secret.

After coming out, Berry left the church and began working in the nonprofit sector, initially as national coordinator for Christian Lesbians Out Together and then as director of the North California Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights.

In 1996 Berry was named director of the United Way's Building Bridges training program, which merged with other LGBT workplace organizations, eventually becoming Out & Equal Workplace Advocates.

Out & Equal partners with companies and government agencies to provide professional development, networking and other opportunities that build and support inclusivity. The organization hosts an annual event, the Out & Equal Workplace Summit, which brings together international experts, employers and LGBT employees to share best practices. “If you are putting all of your energy into hiding, into changing pronouns,” Berry has said, “you are actually not working at full capacity and that hurts the company's bottom line.”

In 2013 Berry self-published “Out & Equal at Work: From Closet to Corner Office,” an anthology of coming-out stories from openly gay and lesbian executives of Disney, Clorox, Hewlett-Packard and Xerox.

Among other honors, Berry received the Bonhame Center Award in 2016 from the Mark S. Bonham Centre for Sexual Diversity Studies at the University of Toronto. She lives in Washington, D.C., with her wife, Cynthia.



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