

# PUBLICATION

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## Review of *A Quick & Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns* by Archie Bongiovanni (Author, Illustrator), Tristan Jimerson (Author)

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*I stress that we as individuals must assess where we are in our own journey of understanding and education about any topic rather than assume that everyone is in the same place. Each individual can then take a step along their own path through reading, listening, researching or watching content on the subject. This is particularly true when discussing diversity and inclusion generally, and gender identity, gender expression and pronoun usage specifically.*

*Fifteen months ago, I received an e-mail from a law school classmate that included a designation in his signature block of "He | Him | His". I had not noticed a similar designation previously. This led me down a path of understanding about the designation and its importance, and of gaining insight and education about the use of pronouns. A part of this journey led to the book Rebecca and I review below – *A Quick & Easy Guide to They/Them Pronouns* by Archie Bongiovanni and Tristan Jimerson. The book's entire premise is "to address this topic for everyone: those that have lived experience and those that are new to this whole concept."*

– Tim Lupinacci

As a firm, Baker Donelson has long fostered a culture of purposeful inclusion so that all employees can feel safe, valued, and supported. This includes daily striving to welcome, affirm and support all our gender non-binary attorneys, law students, staff members, and colleagues. We understand that this is a fundamental principle of respect and dignity for every individual that is critical to a successful work environment where we collectively provide exceptional service through diverse teams who are trusted advisors to our clients.

The *Quick & Easy Guide* is very helpful in better understanding the journey of an individual who is misgendered, including use of an apt analogy of carrying a backpack that gets heavier as the day goes along. The authors describe that "[e]very time a person is misgendered, it feels like someone is adding a brick to my backpack. As the day goes on there are more and more bricks. By the end of the day I feel like I am slowly being crushed by the seemingly unending burden of the gender binary." The most powerful way that we can support our gender non-binary colleagues is to have a more expansive understanding of gender identity and begin using gender neutral pronouns.

The book describes how gender identity is a person's deeply held knowledge of their own gender, which can include being female, male, another gender, or no gender. Gender identity is an innate and largely inflexible part of a person's identity. One's gender identity can be the same or different than the gender assigned at birth. The responsibility for determining an individual's gender identity rests with the individual. Children typically begin to understand their own gender identity by age four, although the age at which individuals come to understand and express their gender identity may vary based on each person's social and familial development.

Each of us found the *Quick & Easy Guide* a short, light, and educational read on non-binary pronoun usage, how to correct a mistake in using the wrong ones, and how to adapt one's language to be more inclusive. It is a

great introduction for anyone wanting to better understand how to address non-binary colleagues and the importance of not misgendering people. Through witty comics and skilled artistry, the authors, Archie, a genderqueer artist, and Tristan, a cisgender male, explain the emotions caused by being misgendered and, more importantly, why it matters.

We also found that the *Quick & Easy Guide's* "comic book" format serves as a terrific framework to build understanding and education on a serious subject matter. The book does a good job of defining many of the terms used in this article that you may not be familiar with and offers helpful "scripts" to engage in discussions about pronoun usage. As more law firms and companies encourage personnel to include their declared pronouns in their email signature blocks, intranet profiles and biographies, our understanding of third-person pronouns is essential to creating a welcoming and supportive environment for gender non-binary employees within the Firm and across our society.

Using they/them pronouns in conversations with friends, in the workplace, and in public allows us to be supportive of non-binary people in our daily lives. The *Quick & Easy Guide* also encourages all of us to have difficult conversations, as this leads to a broader understanding of one another. Role modeling ally behaviors like the conversation below from the book shows people that you respect them and who they are.

*Archie - "Part of being an ally is to correct others when they make mistakes even if it makes you uncomfortable."*

*Tristan - "Awww, but I wanted my 'good ally sticker' without having any hard conversations or making anyone in my life uncomfortable."*

We highly recommend this book to anyone who wishes to learn more about non-binary identities and pronouns. It is a great starting point for those who are new to the concept and a validating read for those who are non-binary themselves and want others to better understand the importance of using their correct pronouns.