



From our sponsors :

**Next Avenue**  
in Your Inbox  
**SIGN UP NOW!**

## Apple's Tim Cook Came Out and We Can Relate

It's not about being gay, it's about knowing and showing who you are

posted by [John Stark](#), December 15, 2014 [More by this author](#)



John Stark is a writer, editor and real estate agent in Boston who previously worked at Next Avenue. You can contact him at [John.Stark@UnlimitedSothebys.com](mailto:John.Stark@UnlimitedSothebys.com).



Apple CEO Tim Cook  
Photo by Kevork Djanssezian/Getty Images

When I lived in New York in the late 1980s, I had a wonderful, brilliant friend, a psychotherapist named Dr. Leah Schaefer. She was a giant in the field of transexualism. She died last year at age 92.

Her patients were largely men and women undergoing required counseling in order to have a sex change. I, too, went to see her for counseling, though not about changing my gender. What I needed was a job change.

Schaefer blurred the lines between patients and friends; she often socialized with those who sat on her couch. We both loved jazz singing, and one night

we went to hear a former patient of hers perform. During a break, I asked her something I couldn't wrap my head around: Why would anyone want to have a sex change? It's a long, painful process. And when it's over, one often ends up a social outcast.

Why not just stay gay, like me? I asked her.

"Because you're not a woman," she replied. "Your brain tells you you're a man. The need to let the world know who you really are is a very strong drive," she explained. "You can try to suppress it, but it eventually wins out."

For that reason, she said, people who have sex changes often wait until middle age. That seemingly rash decision can come as a shock to their friends and family, but not for the person facing surgery. For him or her, it's been a long time coming.

**(MORE: [Sailing Into a Reinvented Life](#))**

### Honesty Is A Theme

My chat with Schaefer came back to me after Apple CEO Tim Cook, 54, recently told the world that he is gay. Writing in Bloomberg Businessweek, Cook said his headline-making decision was based on three things: "To help someone struggling to come to terms with who he or she is, to bring comfort to anyone who feels alone and to inspire people to insist on their equality."

There was most likely a fourth reason that he didn't emphasize, something he might have put this way: "Frankly, I didn't have a choice. Being a gay man more defines who I am at my core than my position as a powerful CEO."

Gay, straight or whatever, I think that boomers can especially relate to Cook's coming out. Countless articles have been written on Next Avenue and other "50 plus" sites about the upsides of getting older. A common theme is honesty: We can finally be who we really are.

**(MORE: [The Retirement Crisis Facing Gays and Lesbians](#))**

We don't sugarcoat our opinions. We have less need of material things. We dress to please ourselves, not what fashion dictates. After so many years on this planet, we have truly come into our own. So damn the torpedoes and full speed ahead. Who cares what others think?

Age gives us the green light to come out of the closet on all fronts.

### **Personal Truth, Social Responsibility**

In his essay, Cook didn't say he had been living a deceptive life or denying his homosexuality. "For years, I've been open with many people about my sexual orientation," he wrote.

He could have easily kept the status quo and not gone public. But I think Cook's boomer brain played another role in his bold decision. It allowed him to embrace the social responsibility of his act — to put the greater good above himself, and in so doing, to be a role model for gay employees.

"I don't consider myself an activist," he wrote, "but I realize how much I've benefited from the sacrifice of others."

You can't always see the bigger picture when you're young. Age gives us a much broader perspective on life.

I used to have another wonderful, brilliant friend when I lived in Los Angeles in the early '90s. His name was Ira, and he was the head of a Hollywood movie studio. Some 15 years older than I, he died of AIDS at 56.

**(MORE: [The Lessons I Learned as an AIDS Volunteer](#))**

Openly gay, he had played it straight for many years.

Cook's announcement brought back a conversation I once had with him, too.

"I realized at a certain age that nobody is going to like me if I don't like myself," he wisely told me. "So one day I came out of the closet to all my friends, family members and colleagues. I figured if people didn't like me for being a gay man, then why in the world would I want them as my friend? From then on, I never pretended to be who or what I'm not."

Ira had to be the most popular person I ever knew. One weekend, he had 92 phone messages.

I believe that Schaefer, was right: Who you are eventually wins out.

You just have to live long enough.

**Like this article? Get more like it in your inbox. Free.**

**SIGN UP**