



Leading with Purpose: Allyship and Leadership in DEI

QUESTIONS

1. Is it ok to just call yourself an ally? Some people have suggested that you need others to identify you as an ally – you can't just decide you're an ally. Why is that?
2. Others have suggested that allyship is more a verb than a noun. It's not so much that we are just always an ally, but more that we are actively engaged in allyship. What is the difference?
3. How can I be sure I'm not showing up as some kind of social justice "savior" when I use my voice and my privilege to challenge injustice and bias?
4. What are some of the biggest challenges for people being able to consistently practice active allyship? What gets in the way?
5. Is there a difference between allyship and leadership? Is it appropriate for people with privilege to be leading social justice/DEI efforts?



HANDOUT

ALLYSHIP

An Ally is someone who is willing to pay attention to – and take action around - the social, economic & political differences and inequities that attend to people based on distinctions of race, ethnicity, age, class, sexual orientation, gender identity & expression, disability, religious or spiritual identity, and nationality (this is not an exhaustive list).

No one person is completely marginalized or completely privileged. Most of us have complex identities involving both marginalization & privilege.

Allies move past shame, guilt, and blame, working to understand how privilege works in their life, as well as how marginalized “others” are perceived through stereotypes & cultural myths. Anyone can become an ally to people with less privilege & institutional power, but it first requires an understanding of one’s own social identities.

“Being an ally” is an on-going process that involves self-reflection, an openness to new ideas, believing other people’s lived experiences, a commitment to on-going education, and taking action & risks.

ACTIVE ALLYSHIP

Consider the following suggestions from “7 Ways to Practice Active Allyship,” Poornima Luthra, *Harvard Business Review*, 11/8/22:

1. Deep curiosity

Understanding the issues surrounding DEI starts with a deep curiosity about our own and others’ *diversity thumbprint*: each individual’s intersectional identity of multiple dimensions coexisting at the same time.

2. Honest introspection

Honest introspection begins with understanding our own biases and how they impact what we say and do, the decisions we make, and whom we tend to view as successful in the workplace.



3. Humble acknowledgement

We must humbly acknowledge that we don't know or fully comprehend how someone else experiences life. Humble acknowledgement requires admitting "I don't know" and reflecting on our own sources of privilege. Privilege is assuming something is not a problem because it's not a problem *for you*.

4. Empathetic engagement

More often than not, when we address microaggressions — what I refer to in my book as *termite biases* — we're met with defensiveness: "Oh, come on. I didn't mean it that way," "You're being oversensitive. Can't you take a joke?," or, "Don't make a big deal out of this." These responses arise from fear: fear of being judged or of being seen as a "bad person."

5. Authentic conversations

Enabling allyship at work requires honest and open conversations, and those require psychological safety: "a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes, and that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking." In a psychologically safe environment, employees feel safe to address the biases and discrimination they witness — without the fear of professional or social repercussions.

6. Vulnerable interactions

To help overcome the fear of being uncomfortable or saying the wrong thing, allies need to embrace their own vulnerability and work with others to identify their own biases — especially the unconscious ones.

7. Courageous responsibilities

Taking courageous responsibility is about making the most of your own sphere of influence. Be observant of who tends to get opportunities to be seen and heard — then take steps to include and amplify those who don't.

- 1. As you read through these 7 suggestions for practicing active allyship, can you think of instances where you did show up with deep curiosity, honest introspection, humble acknowledgement, empathetic engagement, etc.? How did this active allyship affect your interactions with your colleagues?**
- 2. Can you think of instances where you weren't able to show up in these ways? How did the lack of active allyship affect your interactions with your colleagues? Why do you think you were not able to show up in these instances – what stopped you?**
- 3. How can you hold yourself accountable for practicing active allyship?**



Reflective Practice

Take some time to identify someone in your life that you see as an ally, advocate, champion, accomplice, co-conspirator, leader (whatever word works best for you).

Take a moment to write down why you think they are an ally. What is it that they do – and don't do – that causes you to see them as an ally? Be as specific as you can – and jot down not just big actions but small actions as well.

Now consider how you measure up to this person you've identified. What actions do you do – and not do – that are similar to this ally?

Can you identify areas/topics/opportunities where you could use more knowledge, more skill-building, and/or more practice? How can you get more of what you need to develop as an ally and a leader?

Finally, think about setting up a virtual or in person coffee date with the person you've identified. Let them know you've identified them as an ally and a leader - and share some of your own ally development goals with them.