



## Workplace Allyship and Inclusivity 101

As workplaces and organizations tackle the hard work of being more welcoming to all team members/colleagues and the public (particularly for entities that directly engage the public), the values of “inclusivity” and “allyship” become more important.

To implement best practices relative to inclusivity and allyship, there first must be a culture that promotes such values. Often, creating and maintaining that culture involves difficult—and sometimes personally courageous—conversations. Those conversations can be in groups or one-on-one.

How do we create a landscape that promotes good culture-building? What are the rules? What if culture leaders don't participate or have buy-in? Similarly, what if non-team leaders feel excluded from the discussion?

This training focuses on best practices relative to fostering and maintaining a workplace culture that respects all team members through inclusivity and allyship. It's all about mindfully protecting others despite our obvious and not-so-obvious differences.

### I. Basics re: Inclusivity

- “Diversity” is all about *numbers*—the number of people representing a diverse aspect of humanity who are present in the workspace or a part of the workforce.
- “Inclusivity” involves *action* in the form of *interaction* between team members and *active awareness* of the need for inclusivity with the goal that everyone feels valued and a part of the team.
- In the most basic sense, “Inclusivity” is the extent to which someone feels that they matter to an organization or group of individuals.
- There are 3 Levels of Inclusivity: Tolerance, Acceptance and “Party Host.”
- Generally, while diversity and inclusivity both take *work*, by far inclusivity takes the most work since it involves system-building, culture making, and constant awareness/action (mindfulness) to make diverse coworkers/colleagues feel welcome, wanted, and valued.
- Also, while most people get diversity (since it's easier to put one's finger on—you either have diverse numbers or not), many do not get what it means to be inclusive.
- While fatigue is always a risk/factor in any effort to increase diversity and inclusivity within the workplace or any other organization, fatigue is more prevalent with inclusivity since it often requires coworkers/colleagues to get out of their safe zones and habits (e.g. one needs to be more open to having lunch or after-work drinks or interactions with someone whom they'd not ordinarily invite).

- Most often, workplaces and organizations will succeed at making their spaces more diverse only to fail at making such spaces inclusive. The net result: a loss of diversity and wasted time and dollars. More unfortunate: a distaste for attempting diversity and inclusivity ever again.

## II. Basics re: Allyship

- “Ally” is an *identity*; “Allyship” is a form of *action*.
- An ally acts to help humans who often lack a voice to speak on their own behalf or who aren't always in the room when demeaning or marginalizing comments/behaviors occur, or marginalizing policies or plans are made. Thus, it's important to understand that “ally” connotes way more than mere awareness and that “allyship” means actively protecting or speaking up in support of humans who lack equity. This may also include calculating the risks of speaking up/engaging in allyship.
- Words and Phrases for \$500: an important first step in allyship is understanding the historical/statistical framework for why certain groups of human need allies. Hence, one must understand words and phrases like “privilege,” “marginalization,” “sexism,” “equity,” “legal rights,” “mansplaining” and “It was only a joke!”
- Recognizing that there are many “communities” which identify by race, gender, LGBTQ status, ethnicity, disability status, religion, socioeconomic status, age, etc. I know, things are complicated!
- Covering the Territory: Allyship is not limited to protecting/speaking up on behalf of one group. Rather, many groups—women, people of color, persons practicing non-mainstream religions (or none), LGBTQ persons, older persons and persons with disabilities all need workplace allies; sometimes they need for those allies to show up in different ways.
- Culture and Systems: Allyship can't operate in a vacuum. A workplace culture that values marginalized humans/team members operates way differently than a workplace or system that doesn't (e.g. does there exist an inclusivity mission or value statement and/or employee resource groups?).
- Do's and Don'ts: Because we lack a Human Owner's Manual, we humans must figure out things as we go along. As with anything else, there's a right way to be an ally and a wrong way. Every ally makes mistakes; it's critical to apologize; forgiveness is equally critical; and good intent matters on both sides of the equation.
- Intersectionalities: Allyship usually intersects with other core workplace factors, such as management styles; personal growth; political correctness; and balancing workplace life with personal life. Yep, nothing is easy!
- Allyship is inconvenient: a true ally shows up *all the time* regardless of the setting or parties involved. It's not the kind of thing one might turn on or off...

- Compassion=giving of time to be a mentor and sponsor. Sponsorship is the highest form of compassion. It also can be a way of demonstrating allyship to another person or group of people.
- An Acronym to Remember: **ALLY: A** (Awareness—both historical and present-day); **L** (Looking—to protect who is present and who isn't); **L** (Listening—to what's said and what isn't said); **Y** (“Yo”—as in “Yo, that's not a cool thing to say.” In other words, actually *acting* as an Ally).
- Process, process, process: It's okay if you miss an opportunity to be someone's active ally—things happen. Just resolve to try harder next time. Persistence does pay off!

### III. The History Exercise—Allyship Version

- Understanding that everyone has both obvious and hidden identities and traumas, each of which can be a basis to marginalize or discriminate (including to ignore) another human.
- Our identities are informed by history (and sometimes, historical trauma), family, an intrinsic need to live authentically, current political or social landscapes, and a host of other things.
- Many of us have blind spots relative to the historical and present-day challenges of others.
- Practice in expanding/formulating perspective and minimizing judgment. Read up about others' challenges.
- Remember that humans are exceptional at judging—both one's self and others.
- Many of us simply want to be “seen”—respected for who we are.

### IV. Laying the Foundation

- It's important to bear in mind hierarchies relative to conversations: there are those who want change (the “instigators”); those who resist change (the “resistors”); and those who can effect change (the “culture leaders” or “change-makers”). Often there's another larger group—those who are passive/apathetic/intimidated by the entire process and report that they couldn't care less. (Usually, those are majority race/religion/sexuality people.)
- Underlying every Courageous Conversation are values—personal and organizational. Those values don't always align; sometimes an organization's values don't necessarily align with inclusivity and allyship either. The goal—create better alignments.
- **Commitment from the Top.** The most critical factor toward creating a welcoming workplace is the sincere commitment of workplace culture leaders. Sometimes, indirectly approaching leadership to change works better than a head-on approach; culture leaders may become more open-minded if they believe the organization's metrics or image may be impacted by the perception that the organization/workplace is unwelcoming. Or, they might be more

open if they hear that other workplaces like yours (e.g. competitors) are launching diversity and inclusion initiatives.

- **Use Data (External and Internal):** Share with culture leaders external empirical data reflecting how your state's/locale's/industry's workforce is becoming more diverse and other resources to educate
- that diversity and inclusion are pressing needs for the broader community.
- **Enlist a Core Group of “Champions.”** There's safety in numbers, so if possible enlist other workplace colleagues to also lobby for greater diversity and inclusivity. Don't make this a solo venture!
- **Identify Other Stakeholders.** Family members, key clients or constituents, and others whom culture leaders respect can also become stakeholders in the push for a more welcoming workplace or organization.

## V. Engaging in Courageous Conversations (e.g. Talking or Speaking Up)

- The parties to an allyship-related conversation or event often include:  
The **Actor/Vocalizer/Marginalizer**—the person who engages in marginalizing behavior either intentionally or ignorantly;  
The **Target**—the person who is the object of the marginalizing words or behavior;  
The **Ally**—the person in a position to speak up/act on behalf of the Target.  
The **Witness**—someone who sees/hears what's happening and who's trying to decide whether to engage in allyship.  
The **Avoider**—someone who feigns ignorance or who avoids, runs away, or simply refuses to do anything due to fear or indifference (more likely the former rather than the latter).
- **Styles of Allyship (or not):**  
**Sliding Up**—making your presence known and using body language to let the Actor/Marginalizer know that their words/actions aren't acceptable.  
**Direct Approach**—using the “Yo” in ALLY to specifically communicate to the Actor/Marginalizer that what they've said/done isn't acceptable.  
**Sidebar**—Engaging the Target and/or the Actor/Marginalizer after the microaggression takes place (to provide support for the Target and to call out the Actor/Marginalizer re: their words or actions).  
**Reporter**—alerting a person in power/in charge to the Actor/Marginalizer's words or action and letting them take it from there.  
**Avoidance**—failing to engage in allyship; remember, humans are great at denial/avoidance. However, avoidance won't prevent your empathetic heart from making you feel shame.
- A reminder about what it means to be a “leader.” A leader actually leads; they “do.” It takes personal courage to “do.”

- Talking about inclusivity and allyship is difficult for many since we're always afraid of saying the "wrong thing" or of offending someone who's on the conversation (or who may later hear about the conversation). Once more, we're back to the lack of a Human Owner's Manual.
- Often the most intimidating part of allyship is the actual conversation (words, actions, body language) involved in advocating on behalf of another human. Culture leaders need to model ways that promote safe conversations and which still make the point. This includes handling those "backroom conversations" where "it's just us men" (or "women" or "gay folks" etc.).
- Ground rules for productive, safe Courageous Conversations: **The Three Freedoms and One Responsibility**—freedom to think and imagine; freedom to speak without risk of retribution; and the freedom to reply without being judged. The responsibility: to speak only for myself.
- "I want to understand this" vs. "Help me to understand this." The first statement puts the burden on you to be an ally; the second statement puts the burden on the marginalized person. The goal: it's your responsibility to be an ally and not that of the marginalized person.
- Constants: respect, civility and respecting one's personal space.
- More constants: focusing on intent and the need for forgiveness on all sides.
- The No Seeping Rule: while it's critical that productive action/conversations ripple from a Courageous Conversation, what shouldn't ever seep are gossip/marginalizing words about conversation participants.
- Us vs. Them: the goal is to always recognize commonalities far more than differences (see the **Four Commonalities** from Gray Area Thinking®) so that everyone is "us" focused.
- "Struggle": this one word encapsulates the arc of humanity as we have moved from the "isms" (racism, colonialism, classism, sexism, homophobe-ism, disability-ism, etc.) to freedom and mutual recognition and respect. Everyone deserves an equal place at the table.
- Work and Incrementalism: every item of progress relative to inclusivity and allyship is incremental and most of all, it takes *work*.

## VI. **Shutting Down Micro-Aggressions (aka Confronting Racism, Homophobia, Transphobia and other Marginalizing Behavior)**

- **Questioning:** "I'm not sure what you mean by that statement (or question). Can you tell me more?" Or if it's a joke: "I don't understand the joke; can you break that down for me?"

- **Educating:** “Actually, I just read an article that says quite the opposite” or “Really? I just read an online article (or saw on TV) that in fact the reality is....”
- **Empathetic Relating:** “I wonder how it actually feels to be in her (his) (their) shoes.”
- **Expressed Emotions:** “I Statements” such as “I’m hurt by what you just said.” Or, “I’m really rethinking our relationship (project, joint paper, party plans....) because of your statement.”
- **Returning to it later/avoiding the Fight or Flight Emotion (aka Sidebar):** “Two days ago you said in the staff lounge....”
- **Direct Approach:** “Not cool dude. Not cool at all.” (My favorite.)
- Double back to Gray Area Thinking™ and internally (as well as externally) fighting against normalization. We’re human and operate off cues from each other; this is sometimes good but often not so good re: being welcoming.
- Everything takes work and facing our fears. Remember that, please!

## VII. Apology and Forgiveness

- **Apology:** You are going to make a mistake/say/do the wrong thing; I guarantee this. Own up to it and apologize to the person/group whom you’ve offended.
- **Timeliness:** An apology needs to be timely—don’t delay thinking that the offended person (survivor) might forget what was said or done or by believing that the survivor’s behavior suggests that no harm has occurred.
- **Genuine:** An apology must be real and heartfelt. Just going through the motions won’t cut it and the survivor will see through you.
- **Forgiveness:** It’s equally important to forgive; failing to forgive will create festering that can infect the entire team and emotionally harm the survivor.
- If the survivor is having difficulty forgiving a transgression after the marginalizer has genuinely apologized, the survivor must double down/work to forgive. If need be, involve a therapist or counselor to assist in overcoming the difficulty to forgiving.
- A wonderful resource for understanding how to forgive is the Worthington REACH Forgiveness Model: <http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/reach-forgiveness-of-others/>

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