

Workplace Inclusivity & Allyship 101 Training

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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.
- 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. 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.

- 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)

- 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.”
- 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*. This is why we humans are often resistant to change around inclusivity and allyship. And, isn't life already too complicated? Aren't we already fatigued from everything else? Yep, but because you are an active ally, you'll do the hard 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:** "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!

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An open invitation: any human can contact me relative to gender or sexual identity or anything else related to the human condition. I'm a good listener and willing to meet with anyone in a public place or speak on the telephone for up to an hour. elliekrug@gmail.com

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Workplace Allyship and Other Scenarios— Courageous Conversations

1. Explicit Grouping and Labeling

Joe your boss advises that there's a conference at the North Minneapolis (a low-income neighborhood) YMCA that he wants you to attend. In talking about the conference, he says, "Make sure you lock your car doors once you get in that neighborhood; you don't want to get carjacked at some stoplight." What should you say in response?

2. The "Articulate" Person of Color

After a conference room meeting with some folks from outside the organization, Sam, the senior manager, and Rebecca, a relatively new team member who is also a person of color, exit the conference room where they encounter Sally. Sally asks, "How did the meeting go?" In response, Sam says, "Great. Rebecca handled herself so well. She was so incredibly articulate."

Sally looks at Rebecca and can tell that Sam's words hit a nerve. What, if anything, should Sally say to Sam? Or to Rebecca?

3. "I'm Only Kidding"

Several of you are at an after-work happy hour when one in the group (a partner/senior manager) makes remarks about LGBTQ people— "Why do they have to be *that* way? And I'm sick of reading about it on social media and seeing it on TV." When someone in the group shoots a look, the partner/senior manager adds, "I'm only kidding!"

What should you do? What if someone suddenly changes the subject?

4. The Weak Team Member

During a work-group meeting with a dozen people present, Sally states that she's concerned her ideas don't carry as much weight as the ideas of men in the group. Sam her boss responds, "I think you're being a bit too sensitive; give it a break." How should you respond?

Later, you talk to Sam and say, "Sally's really smart. I think she really contributes." In response, Sam says, "I think she does good work too but she's not tough enough for the job. I'd tell her that but I'm afraid she'd become too emotional."

Now what do you do?

5. "I'm Tired of Having to Do Special Things for You"

The unit's annual Fourth of July barbecue is being planned. Frank volunteers to grill his famous pork ribs. Jamal, who is Muslim, reminds Frank that he can't eat pork for religious reasons. Frank's response: "Oh come on, Jamal. Do we need to plan special for you again? Can't you just eat salad?" In hearing this, should you say anything? What would you say? Would it matter if Frank was co-equal or a manager?

6. Assuming Things

Yolanda, who's been with the organization for three years, announces that she's pregnant at a team meeting. Bill, the team lead, says, "Congratulations! But I was hoping that you'd be able to take this project through completion—a year and a half from now. Now I'm going to have to get someone else from marketing involved."

You look around the room and no one says anything. What should you say?

7. "Cramming Diversity Down My Throat"

Four of you are out to lunch. Rose, who's white, complains that she's got three deadlines and just doesn't have the time to attend the mandatory unconscious bias training that's set for tomorrow morning. "I'm sick of them cramming this stuff down my throat," she says. She then turns to Rosa, who is Latina, and says, "No offense Rosa."

Rosa laughs nervously. What should you say in response?

8. "I'm Not Comfortable Getting to Know People"

You knock on Ralph's door where he's speaking with Julie, his company-assigned report. Julie mentions that her kindergarten daughter has her first music recital that afternoon and she's excited for her child. Ralph ignores Julie and signals that her time is up. After Julie leaves the office, you tell Ralph that you thought he shouldn't have ignored Julie's comment about her daughter. Ralph replies, "I'm not comfortable with getting to know people. I'm a big introvert and don't even drive a car. If I give my reports good direction on their work assignments and answer any questions they have, that's good enough."

What should you say to Ralph in response? What, if anything, should you say to Julie?

9. The Road Hog

You are in a meeting with several colleagues, all on the same rung of the corporate ladder. Sarah, who is Jewish, says something about how she feels that no one ever respects her religion. Sally, who likes to dominate the conversation, replies, "Well it would help if you weren't always talking about being Jewish. You mention it every moment you get."

How do you handle this, particularly when you know that Sally is a gossip?

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