

DO YOU QUALIFY AS AN ALLY?

10 (of many) ways to earn that distinction

by Jill Geisler
Loyola University Chicago
Freedom Forum Fellow in Women's Leadership
Notes from Jill's Power Shift Project presentation, "Do You Qualify as an Ally?"

"Just as you are not a leader unless people choose to follow you, you're not an ally unless others believe that you qualify."

1. Understand that power affects our perspectives.

Research* reveals that managers see workplaces more positively than staff, men see harassment as less of a problem than women, whites see discrimination as less serious than minorities, half of non-LGBTQ workers think there are no LGBTQ employees in their workplaces and power reduces our capacity for empathy.

2. Recognize the realities and risks of unconscious bias.

Unconscious bias is the product of assumptions, "gut feelings," individual experiences, mental models, avoidance of the unfamiliar and reflexive stereotyping. It leads to flawed decision-making that contributes to inequity, often for people who are underrepresented in situations and organizations.

3. Be a learner, but don't presume anyone is obligated to be your teacher.

It's an ally's responsibility to learn about current and historic issues that drive inequity. Colleagues may provide insights from their knowledge and personal experiences, but they alone should determine whether they want to serve in that role, and for whom.

4. Recognize the "invisible work" done by underrepresented employees.

Serving on committees, mentoring, coaching, recruiting and representing the organization in the community take time and energy. It is added work that should not be overlooked when evaluating a person's job performance. Rather than "invisible," these contributions should be highlighted, respected and rewarded.

5. Understand the meaning and impact of microaggressions.

Don't be misled by the term "micro." Think of being repeatedly stuck by pins and needles. They may be tiny, but nonetheless cause pain. Allies learn the many forms that microaggressions can take; words and actions that demean, dismiss or disrespect.

6. Find your voice for courageous conversations.

Learn how to speak proactively (initiating the conversation) and reactively (responding to words and actions) in support of equity and injustice. This isn't always easy. It's why we teach it in the Power Shift Workplace Integrity curriculum and provide tips in the full "Do You Qualify as an Ally" presentation.

THE POWER SHIFT PROJECT

7. Challenge systems, practices and assumptions that foster inequity.

Even when organizations believe they support equity in the workplace, their traditional systems for hiring, recruiting, evaluating, promoting, reporting problems and communicating resolutions may be flawed. Look beyond tradition and beyond the surface to identify ways in which systems and assumptions exclude people or reduce their chances for growth.

8. Measure what matters.

When something is important to an organization — revenue, safety, customer satisfaction — results are measured and the data shared. Do the same for diversity in staffing, recruiting, retention and wage parity. And when you are making a case for doing the right thing in any area (especially coverage and content), supporting data can help you respond to misinformation or myths.

9. Be more than a mentor; be a sponsor.

Mentors give valuable advice. Sponsors put their reputation on the line to recommend others for positions and promotions. Be clear with mentees about what they should expect from you as a mentor and what it takes to earn your sponsorship. Whenever possible, go beyond mentorship to sponsorship.

10. Be more than an ally.

Amplify the voices that aren't always heard. Be an active — not passive — bystander in the face of wrongdoing, advocate for equity, be an accomplice in planning change initiatives and support other allies. Do it all with no expectation of credit or profit.

*“Remember, it’s not about you. It’s about elevating others.
You’re not a hero; you’re a helper.”*

*SOURCES

- “Senior Managers Work and Well-Being Survey,” American Psychological Association, 2015
- “Key Findings of Americans Views on Race in 2019,” Pew Research Center, 2019
- “Americans’ Support for Affirmative Action Programs Rises,” Gallup, 2019
- “U.S. Men Less Concerned Than in 2017 about Sexual Harassment,” Gallup, 2019
- “A Workplace Divided: Understanding the Climate for LGBTQ Workers Nationwide,” Human Rights Campaign, 2018
- “Five Ways Men Can Improve Gender Diversity at Work,” Boston Consulting Group, 2017
- “Power Changes How the Brain Responds to Others,” Hogeveen, Inzlicht and Obbi, Journal of Experimental Psychology, 2013