everymind
at work

Allyship 101

Creating an inclusive workspace

Introduction

In today's diverse and interconnected world, allyship has become increasingly crucial in fostering inclusive and supportive environments, especially in the workplace.

An ally is someone who actively supports and advocates for marginalised individuals or groups, working to dismantle systemic barriers and promote equity and inclusion. It is about recognising your privilege to stand in solidarity with others.

This guide explores some of the ways in which you can be an ally in your workplace (and beyond!), making all your colleagues feel included and respected.

Ignorance is not bliss

Get clued up

To be an effective ally, the initial step involves actively listening and educating yourself on the experiences and viewpoints of marginalised communities.

Dedicate time to seek out diverse voices, whether through literature, media, articles, workshops, or engaging in meaningful conversations with colleagues from varied backgrounds.

Here are our top tips...

Take responsibility

Taking the personal responsibility to educate yourself is key, as ignorance will not change the status quo or contribute to meaningful progress towards equality and inclusion.

Share your learnings

Once you have educated yourself, use your privilege and influence to educate others about issues of diversity, equality, and inclusion. Start conversations, raise awareness, and challenge misconceptions.

Be a proactive advocate for change within your organisation and community.

Listen and learn

Listen to the experiences and perspectives of marginalised individuals. Their voices are the most valuable resource in understanding their needs and advocating for change.

Be open to learning from their stories and experiences and use that knowledge to inform your language and actions.

Look inwards

Take time for self-reflection to assess your own privilege, power dynamics, and blind spots. Consider how your actions and behaviours may contribute to or challenge systemic inequalities, and commit to ongoing personal growth and development.

Language matters

Small changes that can make a big difference

Everyday word choices

There are many common words and phrases used that can inadvertently make marginalised individuals feel excluded or uncomfortable.

The alternatives below aim to be more inclusive by avoiding assumptions about an individual's characteristics, thereby fostering a more welcoming and respectful environment for everyone.

Instead of...	Try...
Gendered terms like "guys" or "ladies"	More inclusive alternatives such as "everyone" or "team"
Saying "Welcome, ladies and gentlemen"	"Everyone" or "all"
Assuming "husband", "wife", "boyfriend" or "girlfriend"	Gender-neutral options such as "spouse" or "partner" instead, or simply ask "What does family look like to you?"
"Normal"	"Typical", "usual" or "average"
Describing someone as "crazy" or "insane"	Alternatives like "wild" or "unusual"
"Disabled person"	"Person with a disability"

Common phrases

There are many phrases commonly used in society that reinforce stereotypes or marginalise individuals.

Consider the following:

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

Assuming heterosexuality based on one's perceived gender can dismiss their actual sexual orientation and make them feel invalidated.

"That's so gay"

Using "gay" as a derogatory term contributes to a hostile work environment for LGBTQ+ individuals and can make them feel unwelcome.

"Where are you really from?"

Asking someone about their ethnic background or nationality can make them feel like they don't belong, especially if they were born and raised in the same country as you.

"You're too old/young for this job"

Ageist comments can make employees feel undervalued and overlooked based on their age.

"That's so easy, even a woman could do it"

This statement reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and implies that women are less capable than men.

"You don't look disabled"

Assuming that disabilities are always visible can make individuals with invisible disabilities feel excluded or misunderstood.

"What does it want me to call them?"

Referring to anyone as 'it' can be hurtful and derogatory. If you do not know how to refer to a person's identity (e.g. name or pronouns), politely ask them.

"Let me help you, you must find it difficult with your disability"

Assuming that individuals with disabilities always need help or are incapable of managing on their own can be disempowering and undermine their independence.

"I bet he loves that chick flick"

Making jokes or comments that rely on stereotypes about LGBTQ+ individuals can reinforce these messages and contribute to a toxic atmosphere.

"That's not ladylike"

Gendered expectations of behaviour can be restrictive and reinforce stereotypes.

"I don't see colour"

While the intention behind this statement may be to promote equality, it can come across as dismissive of someone's racial or ethnic identity and the unique challenges they may face.

"It's probably just a phase"

Dismissing or downplaying someone's sexual orientation or gender identity by suggesting it's just a phase, a choice, or not valid, can be hurtful and invalidating.

Workplace scenarios

This language consideration also translates into typical workplace activities…

Meeting greetings

Instead of starting a meeting with "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen," you could say "Good morning, team" or "Hello, everyone".

Employee resource groups

Ensure that the names and descriptions of employee resource groups are inclusive and welcoming to all employees. For example, instead of "Women's Leadership Network", consider "Gender Equality Network" or "Diversity and Inclusion Alliance".

Training and Development Programs

In training materials and presentations, use gender-neutral language and examples that represent a diverse range of identities and experiences.

Job titles and descriptions

When writing job titles and descriptions, use gender-neutral terms where possible. For example, instead of "salesman", use "sales representative" or "sales associate".

Dress Code Policies

Create dress code policies that are inclusive and do not reinforce gender stereotypes. Instead of specifying attire for "men" and "women," use gender-neutral terms like "professional attire" or "business casual".

Email greetings

Use inclusive greetings and closings in emails and other communications. For example, instead of using gender-specific terms like "Dear Sir" or "Sincerely, Mrs. Smith", use neutral terms like "Dear Colleague" or "Best regards".

It's important to be mindful of the language we use in the workplace to ensure that all employees feel respected, valued, and included.

By avoiding exclusionary language and fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity, organisations can create a more positive and supportive work environment for everyone.

Make noise

Amplify marginalised voices

Marginalised individuals often face significant barriers to having their perspectives heard and their experiences acknowledged.

By actively amplifying their voices, we not only provide a platform for their stories and concerns but also contribute to building more equitable and empathetic communities.

Promote inclusivity in meetings

Use language that encourages equal participation and ensures that everyone feels heard and valued in meetings.

For example, "Let's make sure everyone has a chance to share their thoughts" or "Is there anyone who hasn't had a chance to speak yet?"

Welcome new ideas

Encourage employees to share their ideas and perspectives by using inclusive language that fosters openness and innovation.

For example, "We welcome input from all members of the team" or "Feel free to share your thoughts and suggestions".

Create safe spaces for dialogue

Establish forums or affinity groups where marginalised employees can share their experiences, perspectives, and concerns in a safe and supportive environment.

Encourage open dialogue and active listening among all employees.

Provide opportunities for representation

Ensure that marginalised individuals are represented in decision-making processes, that impact their work environment, policies, and practices.

Actively seek out and promote diverse voices at all levels of the workplace hierarchy.

Celebrate diversity

Incorporate language that celebrates diversity and acknowledges the contributions of individuals from various backgrounds.

For example, "We value the unique perspectives and talents that each member of our team brings."

Use your voice

You can use your platform and privilege to amplify the voices of marginalised individuals.

Share their stories, ideas, and achievements, both publicly and within your organisation.

Seek and act on feedback

Seek feedback from marginalised employees on diversity, equity, and inclusion issues.

Offer various avenues for sharing, like surveys and meetings. Listen without judgment and commit to taking action based on their input.

Breaking stereotypes

Challenging assumptions

We must recognise that we are all products of a society that perpetuates harmful stereotypes and we therefore typically view the world through a lens of stereotypes and assumptions.

These preconceived notions can lead to discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion of individuals who do not conform to traditional norms.

As an ally, it is crucial to recognise and challenge these stereotypes to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all.

How to acknowledge your own biases

Educate yourself

Take the time to learn about different types of biases, including implicit biases, stereotypes, and prejudices.

Educate yourself about how biases can manifest in various aspects of life, including the workplace, relationships, and society as a whole.

Examine your beliefs and attitudes

Take a critical look at your beliefs and attitudes about different groups of people.

Ask yourself where these beliefs come from and whether they are based on accurate information or stereotypes. Be willing to challenge and question your own assumptions.

Monitor your reactions

Pay attention to your reactions in various situations. Notice when you feel discomfort, defensiveness, or judgment towards others.

Ask yourself why you are feeling this way and whether your reactions may be influenced by biases.

Reflect on past experiences

Reflect on your own experiences and interactions with others.

Consider times when you may have made assumptions or judgments based on someone's gender, race, sexuality, or other characteristics.

Think about how these biases may have influenced your thoughts, feelings, and actions.

How to challenge stereotypes & assumptions

One of the most important roles of an ally is to challenge stereotypes and assumptions, both in ourselves and others.

This means questioning traditional norms and expectations about gender and sexuality and recognising that individuals are diverse and multifaceted.

We should actively work to break stereotypes and create space for people to express themselves authentically.

Seek different perspectives

Seek out diverse perspectives and experiences to broaden your understanding of the world.

Engage with people from different backgrounds, cultures, and identities. Listen to their stories and learn from their perspectives.

Don't assume - ask questions

Instead of assuming someone's identity based on their appearance or behaviour, we should ask questions and listen to their experiences.

By taking the time to understand someone's identity on their own terms, we can create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for all.

Be open to feedback and learn from mistakes

It is inevitable that we will make errors along the way, but it is how we respond to these mistakes that truly matters.

Instead of becoming defensive, we should listen to feedback with an open mind and use it as an opportunity for growth and reflection.

Publicising pronouns

Fostering inclusivity and respect

If a person has never had to worry about which pronoun others use to refer to them, gender pronouns might not seem that important. But for people who are often questioned or misgendered, the experience can leave them feeling excluded and alienated.

It is wrong to assume someone's gender pronouns just by looking at them. Asking and using someone's gender pronouns is a positive way to support the people you work with and create an inclusive work environment.

Common pronouns include she/her/hers, he/him/his, and they/them/theirs but there are other nonbinary pronouns too.

If you have questions, politely ask the person if they feel comfortable giving examples of how to use those pronouns. You could ask: "What pronouns do you use?" or "What pronouns would you like me to use?"

Sharing your pronouns is a great way to make communication easier for teams and foster a safe space for everyone to bring their 'whole self' to work.

You can begin by updating your pronouns on your:

- Email signature
- Business cards
- LinkedIn profile
- Messaging apps
- Social media profiles

Updating these platforms with one's gender pronouns tells people that you will not assume their gender and that you support the need for diversity and inclusion. Including pronouns is also a preventative measure of confusion for people with gender-neutral names.

Take action

Speak up against discrimination

If you hear discriminatory language, silence isn't an option. Take action by speaking up against biases, behaviours, or policies in the workplace that lack inclusivity. By confronting harmful attitudes and stereotypes, you can become an ally and advocate, fostering a safer and more respectful environment for all.

When addressing discrimination, it's essential to approach the situation with empathy, respect, and a commitment to fostering understanding. Start by addressing the issue directly with the individual or individuals involved, using assertive communication and specific examples to illustrate the impact of their words or actions.

Additionally, consider reaching out to HR or other appropriate channels within your organisation to report incidents of discrimination and request support in addressing the issue.

Documenting the incident and any subsequent actions taken can help ensure accountability and track progress towards creating a more inclusive workplace culture.

Examples:

How to speak up against discrimination

We know it can be difficult, so here are some examples of how you could speak up against discrimination in different situations. Remember to tailor your approach based on the specific situation and the dynamics of your workplace.

Direct addressing

"I heard you use a derogatory term to describe a colleague earlier. I want to let you know that language like that is not acceptable here. It perpetuates harmful stereotypes and creates a hostile environment for our colleagues."

Questioning assumptions

"I noticed you made a comment assuming our new team member's gender. Why not ask them directly how they identify instead of making assumptions? It's important to respect people's identities and use the correct pronouns."

Reporting to HR or management

"I witnessed discriminatory behaviour during the team meeting today, and I'm concerned about the impact it has on our workplace culture. I'd like to report the incident to HR so we can address it appropriately."

Educational approach

"I'm not sure if you're aware, but the term you used to describe our client is considered offensive.

Using respectful language is important to maintain professionalism and show respect for all individuals, regardless of their background."

Offering support

"I noticed you seemed uncomfortable during the conversation earlier. If you ever experience discrimination or harassment in the workplace, please know that I'm here to support you. We can address the issue together and ensure it's resolved."

Using positive reinforcement

"I appreciated how you addressed the inappropriate joke during the meeting and emphasised the importance of respectful communication. We need to hold each other accountable and create a culture of inclusion."

Setting boundaries

"I want to make it clear that discriminatory language or behaviour is not tolerated in our team. Moving forward, let's commit to creating a respectful and inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and supported."

Providing education and resources

"I understand that discussing diversity and inclusion can be challenging, but it's essential for creating a respectful workplace.

Would you be interested in attending a training session or workshop on unconscious bias? It could help us all better understand how our actions impact others."

Remember that speaking up against discrimination may not always be easy, but it is necessary for creating positive change.

Your actions as an ally can make a significant difference in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace and beyond. Together, we can work towards building a more respectful and equitable world for everyone.

DEI keyword glossary

Learning key terms related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is essential as an ally. By understanding the terminology, you can engage in meaningful discussions, advocate for marginalised communities, and contribute to creating a more inclusive environment.

Diversity

Refers to the presence of a wide range of identities, backgrounds, and perspectives within a group or organisation, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, socioeconomic status, and more.

Equity

Involves ensuring fairness and justice in processes, systems, and outcomes, taking into account historical and systemic inequalities. Equity aims to provide everyone with the resources and opportunities they need to thrive, regardless of their background or identity.

Inclusion

Involves creating an environment where all individuals feel valued, respected, and supported, and where their voices and contributions are recognised and appreciated. Inclusion seeks to foster a sense of belonging and empower diverse perspectives.

Equality

Refers to the state of being fair and just, where all individuals are treated with the same rights, opportunities, and dignity regardless of their differences. It entails the absence of discrimination, prejudice, or bias based on factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, or disability.

Bias

Refers to preconceived notions or prejudices that influence our thoughts, behaviours, and decision-making processes. Bias can be implicit (unconscious) or explicit (conscious) and may manifest in various forms, including racial bias, gender bias, and age bias.

Intersectionality

Recognising that individuals hold multiple intersecting identities (such as race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, etc.) that shape their experiences and access to privilege or discrimination. It emphasises the interconnected nature of social categorisations and systems of oppression.

Allyship

Refers to the practice of actively supporting and advocating for marginalised individuals or groups, particularly by those who hold privilege or belong to dominant social groups.

Marginalised individuals/groups

Refers to those who face social, economic, or political exclusion and discrimination based on their identities, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or socioeconomic status. They experience barriers to accessing opportunities and rights available to more privileged groups and may encounter stigma and prejudice.

Microaggressions

Refers to subtle, often unintentional, verbal or nonverbal comments, actions, or behaviours that communicate derogatory or negative messages towards marginalised groups.

Privilege

Refers to unearned advantages or benefits that individuals receive based on their social identities, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. Privilege grants certain individuals access to opportunities and resources that are not equally available to others.

Representation

Involves the portrayal or visibility of diverse identities, perspectives, and experiences in media, organisations, and society at large. Representation is important for combating stereotypes, promoting inclusivity, and validating the experiences of marginalised groups.

Accessibility

Refers to the design of products, services, environments, and communication methods that are usable and inclusive for people of all abilities, including those with disabilities. Accessibility aims to remove barriers and ensure equal access to opportunities and resources.

Systemic barriers

Refers to entrenched obstacles in society that hinder the advancement and wellbeing of marginalised groups. These barriers, found in social, economic, political, and cultural systems, perpetuate inequalities and limit access to resources and opportunities.