

Diversity and Inclusion Leaders Need to Know How to be Diversity and Inclusion Allies



By *Simma Lieberman, The Inclusionist*

At some point in our lives, everyone needs an ally, a person who supports our ideas, encourages us to follow our dreams, or defends us against naysayers. At some point in our lives, we've probably all had opportunities to be an ally to another person, and perhaps made a difference.

An integral part of being a diversity inclusion leader, or diversity and inclusion champion, is to be a diversity and inclusion ally to another person, or group of people.

A diversity and inclusion ally is someone who is willing to take action in support of another person, in order to remove external barriers that impede that person from contributing their skills and talents in the workplace or community.

Being an ally takes courage because it might mean speaking out against comments or jokes that are racist, homophobic, sexist, etc.

If the people making those jokes are your peer group or the people you've known for years, it might mean they stop inviting you places, and start to exclude you.

It might mean recommending a talented employee for a promotion, who keeps getting passed over because they are disabled, and people making the decisions don't think the person can do the job because of their disability and don't bother finding out.

It might mean even reporting a fellow employee to a manager at a higher level, because they refuse to stop harassing another employee based in their age, race/ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.

It might mean that if no one else steps up, the bully will single you out, and hopefully you'll have an ally who will stand up for you.

It might mean that by stepping up as an ally, you've helped your company turn a profit, because you've helped create a workplace where everyone has an opportunity to excel, and where customers across the whole diversity spectrum love to do business.

Why Diversity Inclusion Allies Are Vital to Your Success and the Success of the Whole Organization

1-If not stopped, exclusionary, discriminatory, and inappropriate or offensive behavior imbeds itself in the whole culture and becomes the norm.

2- It will be difficult to attract and hire the best people. The Internet is powerful.

3- The marketplace is diverse, and it's easy to lose market share if your workplace gets branded unwelcoming for people who are not from a particular demographic.

4- If you are an ally to other people, they will support you when you need an ally.

5- Learning to be an ally will break down barriers between people, and create environments where people share resources, expertise and ideas. When that happens, you create an inclusive culture where people love to do their best work, and provide stellar customer service.

Seven Ways to be an Outstanding Diversity and Inclusion

1. Attend events, educational programs and discussion groups at work and/or outside of work that address issues of workplace inclusion.
2. Create opportunities for people from different demographic groups in your workplace to work together on projects.
3. Take some time to imagine what it would be like to be a LGBT person (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender) and feel like you have to hide who you are, and constantly have to avoid the use of pronouns when you talk about your partner, or just what you did over the weekend.
4. If you hear an employee, colleague or friend making offensive jokes or comments about people from based on demographics, stop them immediately, and let them know you don't want to hear it, and tell them why.
5. Don't assume that because someone from a targeted group doesn't speak up, or make a complaint, that they think it's ok. That's why people need allies, because it can be daunting and even dangerous to be the member of a targeted group, and feel like no one else cares.
6. Identify the unwritten rules, and cultural norms in your organization, that anyone who wants to be successful needs to know.

Develop a process by which all employees learn those unwritten rules. Too often, the people who are included the fastest are those that are similar in some way to people in leadership.

Other employees have to spend more energy trying to understand the unwritten rules for success, which zaps performance and innovation energy

Mentor, or create a mentorship program for new hires, to help integrate everyone, not just the ones who are like you, into your organization. Help new hires gain the knowledge, skills and experience they need to be successful.

Simma Lieberman helps organizations become more profitable by creating inclusive cultures where people do their best work. Leaders contact her when they want to develop and implement a strategy that leverages the skills and talents of employees at every organizational

level. <http://www.simmalieberman.com> <<http://www.simmalieberman.com/>>
Contact Simma at 1-510-527-0700 or Simma@SimmaLieberman.com