

Diversity Briefs ... from the Office of Recruitment & Diversity

Becoming a Diversity and Inclusion Ally

The City University of New York is unwavering in its commitment to the values of diversity and inclusion. However, for the University to meet its goals of creating a broadly diverse workforce of individuals who feel valued and appreciated for their talents and contributions, we need allies.

An ally is a person who stands up for another person or group. Allies recognize that inequality exists in the world and take active steps to eliminate it within their sphere of influence. Allies are unwilling to accept the status quo, so this may mean speaking up rather than staying on the sidelines. Also, allies are open to different perspectives that can be used to increase understanding in their unit and promote trust in the workplace. Allies are active participants in organizational change. Here are several examples of allies:

- A male tells his coworkers that he's no longer interested in hearing jokes that are demeaning to women.
- A manager warmly welcomes a new hire and expects the entire team to assist in her/his transition to the new unit.
- A supervisor makes it clear that there's a zero tolerance policy for racial, religious or ethnic slurs.
- A colleague encourages a person with an accent to volunteer to give a presentation.

Becoming an ally is not a "one-size-fits-all" process because it varies with the needs and circumstances of the situation, and it also requires a healthy dose of honest self-reflection and humility. Becoming an ally is not about political correctness or being "nice." It's about our collective responsibility to help create an environment that brings out the best in all of us.

Learning to be an ally can help to create a workplace where people feel comfortable sharing their ideas, expertise and resources. Becoming an ally is a skill: it's something you can learn. While this may be easy for some, for others it will require practice and effort. Depending on the situation, it can be a simple demonstration of support for your colleague's effort, a heartfelt "thank you" for a job well done, or it may mean going the extra mile by stepping out of your comfort zone and speaking up. Think about how you can use your power to support colleagues who are different than you? How can we become agents for positive change in our workplace? Start out simply, by taking one step at a time. You may want to try the following strategies:

1. Educate yourself about the culture/customs/lifestyle of others by attending events, programs or discussion groups.
2. Remember that not all members from a particular group are alike, so avoid assumptions.
3. Include people with different experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives on your work teams, including search committees.
4. Share information – be as transparent as possible with the policies and procedures in your unit.
5. If you hear a colleague making an offensive comment, take a risk by saying that their language is not acceptable and tell them why. Attempt to peel away the "I was just joking" response.
6. Don't assume that if a person from a targeted group is silent, this means the remark is okay.
7. Try not to be judgmental – always challenge your own assumptions.
8. Be an active listener.
9. Becoming an ally is both a goal and a continual process of learning, so don't be afraid to make mistakes.

There are tremendous benefits in becoming a diversity and inclusion ally on behalf of our colleagues. Doing so will help to create a workplace in the University that values the contributions, supports the ideas, congratulates the successes, and offers opportunities for professional development and growth for all members of our team. At some point in our lives, we've all been treated unfairly due to an insensitive comment, an exclusionary practice, or even a bullying behavior. Being an ally is a reciprocal process – and *you* just may need an ally one day!

"Diversity is about creating magic – finding those who have disappeared and helping them re-appear." – Maura J. Cullen, 2008



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