



Ally-In-Action Manifesto - Part 1

By Dr. Maura Cullen

The first three of fifteen declarations, which propel allies into action, and serve as a reminder of what it means to be a long-term ally.

1. DECIDE

Tony Robbins states that life changes in a moment of decision. Allies need to make a conscious decision to be an ally. To grow as an ally, one must engage in self-education and demonstrate outwardly ally behavior. This declaration to commit is what distinguishes an ally-in-action from an accidentally ally. Being an accidental ally takes little intention and may not lead to becoming a dedicated ally.

2. TRAIN YOUR BRAIN

Our minds are like computers, in order for an output or result there must be an input. Once you train your brain for what to look for the brain will take care of the rest. As kids, we are told to look both ways before crossing the street; to say, please and thank you and not to put your hand on a hot stove. Once your brain understands what you want it to do, it tries hard to cooperate, but it needs reminding at times. This is why it is essential to be intentional about furthering your growth as an ally. You must constantly feed your brain to notice when there is an opportunity to serve as an ally.

Have you ever gone through the process of purchasing a car? Once you find a car you are interested in buying you all of a sudden see this car everywhere. It's not as though there has been a sudden influx of that car in your neighborhood, rather, you have trained your brain to notice when that car appears.

Similarly, there are an endless number of discriminatory acts that occur each day that you must train your brain to notice in order to interrupt that behavior.

Have you ever noticed how often people who are elderly are rendered invisible? When they go out to a restaurant, too often the wait staff will ask a younger person at the table what the older person would like to order, even though the elderly person is sitting right there. Or, they will speak very loudly assuming the person has a hearing limitation.

Have you noticed that people of color are far more likely to be asked to produce identification than their white counterparts when writing a check or using a credit card? That security personnel disproportionately follow people of color in stores?

Training your brain to notice inconsistencies will increase the likelihood of taking effective action.

3. IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU-IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT YOU-IT'S NOT ONLY ABOUT YOU

Often you will hear people say, "It's not about you." Perhaps a more accurate statement is, "It's not ONLY about you." For most people, the uncomfortable truth is that it is almost always about us. It's not so much about ego but rather how we see the world in relation to ourselves. That being said, allies must have enough self-awareness to not make it about themselves and at the same time focus on the experience of the target member.

What is frustrating for many people with targeted identities is the seemingly endless attention demanded by dominant members, especially when a dominant member has made an offensive comment or behavior. Ideally, this would be the moment that the dominant member acknowledges the impact of their action and instead of going to their intention, they would spend time discussing the impact of their

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actions. Unfortunately, what happens more often than not, is the person from the targeted identity ends up comforting the person with the dominant identity.

When a member of the target group comforts the person with the dominant identity, this replicates the dynamic of oppression. For instance, when a white person makes a racist comment or tells a racist joke, they may seek absolution from the person of color, or worse, they excuse their own behavior by saying they didn't mean anything by it. The person of color is left with the option of confronting the racist behavior, which often result in the white person getting upset or accusing the person of color of blowing things out of proportion. The other common option is to comfort the white person by telling them it is not a big deal and not to worry about it. As a result, a seed of resentment may be planted.

It is understandable the frustrations target members continually face as interactions are being redirected to the dominant perspective. At times, targets want to scream, "It's not about you! For once in your life make it about me!"

Reality dictates that it is always about us, but it is not ONLY about us. This acknowledgement of a dual reality has the dominants thinking outside of themselves.

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