



Ally-In-Action Manifesto - Part 2

By Dr. Maura Cullen

The ALLY-IN-ACTION MANIFESTO was created as a way to keep myself focused being an agent of change for social justice. There are fifteen declarations in total that propel allies into action and serve as a reminder of what it means to be a long-term ally.

Over the next several newsletters I will highlight these declarations in more detail until all fifteen have been shared. I hope you find them helpful as you rededicate your commitment to improving the lives of all.

See [last month's newsletter](#) to view that first three declarations.

4. GO FROM NO to KNOW.

Mark Twain said, "We're all ignorant just about different things." In other words, you don't know what you don't know. At times, allies place an undue burden on themselves by believing they should know everything. Somehow we think we have failed the ally test if we cannot remember every holiday for every imaginable group or if we do not know the appropriate terminology for every situation. Accept the reality that you are going to make mistakes.

Often we are so afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing, that we don't say anything at all. Target group members may perceive this lack of action or conversation as apathy. You may be seen as not caring enough to get involved in the discussion. As a result, the process of building trust can erode.

We need to take a deep breath and remember that it is impossible for any one person to know everything there is to know. So stop berating yourself. That being said, it is not license to get lazy and forego furthering your own education. Read books, watch movies, go to different cultural events, attend lectures, have dinner in a different neighborhood, talk with friends, make new friends, take a course online or on campus, etc. There are infinite ways to continue self-education.

DON'T PLAY THE "BUT I'M A GOOD ONE..." GAME

The "But I'm a good one..." game is played on two levels. The first involves dominant group members facing off to outdo one another with the hope of being seen as the best ally ever. Allies fall all over themselves trying to prove just how good an ally they are and how other dominants just don't get it. A popular strategy that allies employ is the 'find the bigot game'. This is when dominant group members lay in wait for other dominant group members to screw up by saying or doing something inappropriate. As soon as it has been established who will be sacrificed as the scapegoat bigot, the rest of the dominants can rest easy that their shortcomings will not be discovered. As a bonus, we get to point our accusing fingers at the 'bigot' in order to make ourselves look better. It's the notion that if I make you look bad then I look better. Thus, I have now successfully established myself as the "good one".

As a result of this foolishness, dominants are often competing as they jockey for positions to be seen as the perfect ally. The effects are damaging to all involved including target group members. This competitive environment breeds hostility and a lack of trust. Trust is an essential element of becoming better allies. Our best work towards becoming better allies is often in the company of other allies. Allies need to create an environment that is safe yet challenging; where our mutual goal of becoming better people can be realized. We need to create environments where we can seek knowledge with other allies rather than be humiliated by them.

The "But I'm a good one" game can also be played by dominant members towards target group members. When dominants play the "I'm a good one" game with other dominants the consequences are harmful. When the same game is played with targets the consequences are equally harmful for several reasons.

Ally-In-Action Manifesto - Part 2

The trust by target group members can be eroded by dominants who attempt to prove they are "a good ally" can erode the trust of target group members. Dominants are fond of letting the target group member know that some of their best friends are from their same target identity. Statements such as "some of my best friends are black or gay" are used as proof that they 'get it'. However real and well intended, this behavior can be perceived as disingenuous. As a result, target members may be cautious or leery of building an ongoing relationship.

Another consequence is the attention placed on the dominant person at the expense of the target member or the issue at hand. Dominants are use to being dominates, of having attention centered on them and their needs. Being seen as "the good one" or the savior just reinforces the dynamic of rendering target members invisible.

As allies, we need to stop behavior that results in negative dynamics. Instead of playing the "I'm a good one" game, perhaps we could re-frame it; "How can I become a better one".

Articles are provided for educational purposes and may be reprinted unaltered without prior permission, provided credit is given to the author as the source and the following paragraph is included. Notice of their use and publication, however, would be appreciated and can be sent to info@TheDiversitySpeaker.com.

Dr. Maura Cullen is the author of "35 Dumb Things Well-Intended People Say: Surprising Things We Say That Widen the Diversity Gap". She is widely considered one of the nation's foremost authorities of diversity issues on college campuses today. Maura has over 25 years of experience as a keynote speaker and trainer. She earned her doctorate in Social Justice & Diversity Education from the University of Massachusetts, is a Founding Faculty member of the Social Justice Training Institute and Founder of the Diversity Student Summit. To learn more visit www.TheDiversitySpeaker.com.