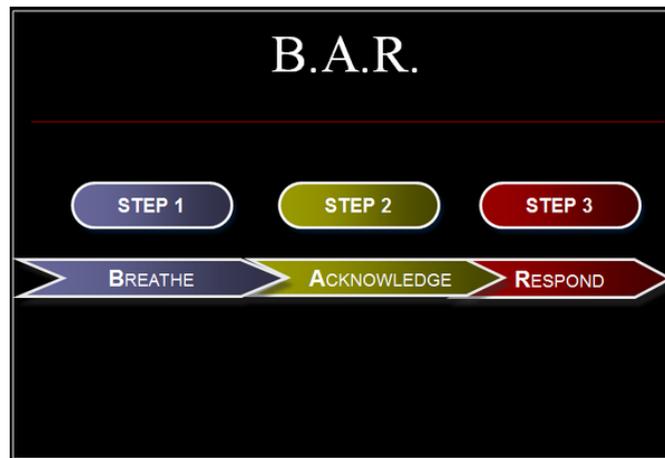


Ally-In-Action Manifesto - Part 4

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.



9. RAISE THE B.A.R.

One of the most powerful tools I have found in dealing with events or conversations about diversity is the acronym B.A.R. I wanted to create a simple yet effective way to deal with my emotions when someone was doing or saying things that I found offensive. In the past I would get very angry at what someone was saying or doing and immediately react, which was not always the best course of action. It was the old adage of "open-mouth-insert-foot," so I developed this term that I like to think of as "**Raising the B.A.R.**" The concept may be simple, but do not underestimate the power it has when you put it into action.

What follows is a description of two very different models of communication. The first, **B.A.R.**, is the more desirable of the two as it creates a respectful and more compassionate exchange. The second model, **R.A.B.** (**B.A.R.** in reverse) is an ineffective and harmful mode of communication.

B. The letter "**B**" in **B.A.R.**, reminds us to *Breathe* when we get into stressful situations. Breathing is one of the most effective, but underutilized tools available. As you sit here reading this, I invite you to take a deep breath. I mean it. Please take a deep breath. When we do this it serves several purposes.

1. It relaxes us, which is always a good way to approach a stressful conversation.
2. It sends oxygen to our brains, which also serves us well.
3. It buys us some time so that we can choose a better response.
4. Most important we cannot speak when we are trying to breathe. This saves us from the "open mouth - insert foot" drama.

A. The letter "**A**" in **B.A.R.**, suggests that we *Acknowledge* what the other person is saying. Vital to your success in achieving this challenging goal is to understand one very important distinction. In order to acknowledge what someone else is saying, you do not have to agree with him or her.

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Acknowledging can be actively listening and repeating back to the person what they are saying, to make certain that you fully understand what they mean. You may also ask clarifying questions or ask them to give you some examples. Ask them how they arrived at such a conclusion. The most important part of this step is that the other person feels as though they have been heard and that you understand. It does not necessarily mean you agree with what they are trying to communicate.

R. The letter "R" in **B.A.R.**, has us *Responding* to the other person. Notice that this is the last step in a three-step process, not the first step that usually occurs in our conversations. Making it the final step and not the first, you accomplish two things. The first is the notion of "seek first to understand before being understood." The beauty of this is that once a person gets a chance to speak their mind and feel understood, they are more likely to listen to what you have to say. Secondly, we are able to formulate a better response given this understanding and are less reactionary.

In our less than perfect moments as human beings, we sometimes do this process in reverse, bringing about a very different result. Instead of doing B.A.R., we do R.A.B. Here is the three-step process in reverse showing the exact opposite result of what we're trying to achieve.

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