



Ally-In-Action Manifesto - Part 3

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.

7. IMPACT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN INTENT

"Impact is about your reality. Intent is about mine." (Adam Cotterall, Blog post 9/23/11)

"The intent is what a person meant to say or do. The impact is the effect it had on someone else. The impact it had may not be what the person intended." (Joe Griffin and Ivan Tyrrell)

My colleague, Reverend Dr. Jamie Washington utilizes a wonderful analogy to demonstrate the difference between intent versus impact.

Let's say I step on your foot. Now your foot hurts. However, I tell you that I didn't intend to hurt you, so does your foot no longer hurt? Of course it does. Later in the day someone else steps on that same foot, now it hurts more. But again, they said they didn't mean to hurt you so does your hurt go away now? Let's say this happens a couple more times during the course of the day. Now you are so sick of people stepping all over you that you are about to lose your temper. Instead of lashing out, you keep it all the pain and frustration inside. Later on that night, someone drops a napkin on that same foot that has been stepped on all day long. Kaboom! You totally lose it and start yelling at this person.

The person that dropped the napkin on your foot thinks you have totally lost it because of your over-reaction. The reaction you gave was not proportional to the initiating event. Is the person correct in accusing you of totally over-reacting? Perhaps. But the story doesn't end there.

8. VIDEO VS SNAPSHOT

The person who dropped the napkin on your foot never witnessed the pain you experienced throughout the day so they haven't any idea why a napkin would hurt so much. This is the difference between someone seeing a **snapshot** of a situation versus seeing a **video** of the events. When we only see snapshots of one another's experiences, it is easy to accuse the person of over-reacting. This is often seen when someone tells an inappropriate joke or uses an offensive term. The person tells you to get over it or lighten up.

However, it is the video that tells the real story. If the napkin were the only thing that fell on your foot that day, it would not have been a big deal. But when people get to see the video of your experience throughout the course of the day they are far more likely to be understanding and treat you with the compassion you deserve.

We all need to work on looking beyond the snapshots and understand when you step into someone else's video it may hurt more than you realize.

The above example of getting your foot stepped on occurred all in one day. Now imagine a lifetime of feeling stepped on so to speak. Of having people treat you as less than other people, ignoring or ridiculing you. People making hurtful jokes or using offensive words and then minimizing it by saying they didn't mean anything by it.

When we step into someone else's video, avoid seeing only the snapshot and jumping to your intention. Rather, accept that you jumped into their video and accept responsibility for the impact of your behavior. I am

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not suggesting that you take responsibility for all the hurt this person has accumulated over the years, rather, to acknowledge your part of their pain.

Does intention count for something? Absolutely. I would prefer dealing with someone who accidentally stepped on my foot opposed to someone who stomped on it intentionally. I would be far more forgiving to the well-intentioned person. Yet we must also acknowledge that even well intended people cause harm.

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