



Ally-In-Action Manifesto - Part 5

By Dr. Maura Cullen

10. FORGIVE BUT NEVER FORGET

“If you compassion does not include yourself then it is incomplete.” - Buddha

Many allies have difficulty reconciling their own mistakes. Too often, they end up berating themselves, unwilling to let go and forgive themselves. Of course, the notion of letting go is easier said than done; yet hanging onto to our mistakes serves no one. This section is called *Forgive But Never Forget* because it is imperative that allies become skilled in forgiving themselves in order to maintain their effectiveness in the work of dismantling oppression.

For many, it is far easier to forgive someone else’s shortcomings than their own. As allies, we need to acknowledge the cost of not forgiving ourselves when we make a mistake or take a misstep. As long as we hold onto our errors, we will not be fully present for the moment at hand. Our internal dialogues get replayed over and over again, and we get stuck. Allowing ourselves to stay stuck prevents us from accepting the lesson and continues onward in our journey as allies.

Also, we may allow that guilt or shame to influence future decisions in hopes of diminishing our own pain. We may be fearful of speaking up or taking action because we lack the courage or confidence to be resilient.

Here is an example of one such dedicated ally.

“I attended a rally supporting same-sex marriage. I had my clerical white collar on--a turn-off for some and perhaps a possible threat for others--is she supportive or has she come to rally against us??? I did, however, have a supportive sign in my hands and an equality sticker on my coat lapel. I began talking with a gay couple and asked them how they were doing and wondered if they had heard the news that Eric Holder had said Utah cannot go against federal law. We started talking. I forgot my own advice about listening first when they began their story. In my wanting to show I was an ally, I tried to "jump" in with words of support and I made a comment about the governor not wanting to make a stand due to his religious conviction. I suddenly saw a different look come into the man's eyes and I realized he belonged to that same religion as the Governor. I backed off

immediately, but the moment had been compromised by what I had said. I was no longer a safe person to talk with due to my remarks. We parted with "nice" words, but I had only added to his hurt feelings about not getting their wedding license in time by saying something against a tenet of his religion. A great example for me: practice what I preach!"

"Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself." - Suzanne Somers

NEVER FORGET

Typically, when people use the saying, "Forgive but don't forget", there may be overtones of resentment. It is as though the person is issuing a low-level threat, that I will forgive you this time but mess up again and I will never forgive you again. Which, of course, is not forgiveness at all.

My intent for saying "never forget", is not filled with resentment towards the other person that has just caused harm, rather it should serve as a reminder that you should not forget the lesson you just experienced. In the previous section I spoke of letting go in order to forgive yourself. It may seem contradictory that I am saying let go but never forget. The letting go part is about the emotions that are keeping you stuck. The 'never forget' part is the knowledge gained through the experience so you don't repeat the mistake. This knowledge will aid you in becoming a better ally.

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