

12 Ways to be an Actionable Ally

Allyship is more than just a buzzword - it's about showing up, speaking out, and taking meaningful action to support others.

Whether you're new to allyship or looking to deepen your efforts, this list offers practical ways to make a real difference.

Think of these tips as small steps that can create big ripples. It's not about being perfect; it's about being intentional. Allyship is a journey, and every action you take helps create a more inclusive and supportive environment for everyone.

If you're interested in learning more, or considering allyship training for your team, get in touch at tania@desagloballeadership.com. Our allyship workshop has a 95% approval rating from participants and 93% of them committed to take action on their learnings.

Ready to roll up your sleeves and make an impact? Here are 12 actionable ways to be an ally in your workplace and beyond!

1 Elevate the Message, Not the Delivery

In many workplaces, a woman's communication style often becomes the focus of critique, overshadowing the value and content of her ideas. Comments about a woman's tone, laugh or speaking style can unintentionally and unfairly diminish her contributions.

[Research from Stanford University](#) by Shelley J. Correll, PhD, and Caroline Simard, PhD, highlights that women are more likely than men to be critiqued for communication style and receive vague feedback like: "Her style can be a bit off-putting." These comments often miss the substance of what's being said, steering attention away from the bigger picture.

The next time you hear someone focusing on how a woman communicates rather than what she's saying, consider gently redirecting with: "I think her points are really worth exploring further. Let's dig into her ideas."

By shifting the conversation, you help create an environment where contributions are valued for their content, less critiqued for their style.

2 Lift Each Other Up

When was the last time you felt the joy of celebrating someone else's success? It's a powerful reminder of how much kindness and encouragement can mean. A simple act of recognizing someone's achievement - whether through a genuine smile, a kind word, or an uplifting gesture - can go a long way.

Think about how we can bring that same spirit of support into our everyday lives, especially in the workplace. While competition is natural, celebrating each other's accomplishments fosters a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect.

How can you cheer someone on for their work achievements? It could be as small as sending a thoughtful thank-you message, reacting with a positive emoji during a meeting, or offering public recognition in a team huddle, newsletter, or forum. You might even nominate someone for a bonus, award, or leadership opportunity.

Take a moment to reflect: Who are you celebrating? Which colleagues have been putting in more effort and deserve to be acknowledged? How will you offer your support and make sure you're lifting up those who need it most?

3 Make Feedback Specific & Meaningful

We've all heard feedback filled with vague phrases like "She's a team player" or "He always gives 110%." While these might sound positive, they often lack real meaning and fail to provide useful insights.

Generic feedback like this can be especially unhelpful because it's not actionable and an opportunity to give meaningful recognition and constructive guidance is missed. Instead of relying on overused phrases, take the time to be detailed and precise. Highlight specific achievements, behaviors or improvements. Share examples of how someone's work made a difference and suggest clear steps for further growth.

For example, instead of saying "She's a team player," you might say, "She consistently ensures everyone's input is considered during meetings and helps keep the team aligned toward shared goals." Rather than "He gives 110%," try something like, "He worked extra hours last week to ensure the project met the deadline, which showed his dedication and problem-solving skills."

By being thoughtful and intentional with your words, you can help create a more supportive and empowering environment - one that celebrates everyone's unique contributions and value.

4 Stop Interruptions and Amplify Voices

Interruptions happen all too often, and they can disproportionately silence women in the workplace. In fact, [a study by Dr. Kieran Snyder](#) showed that:

- Men interrupted at twice the rate that women did
- Men are almost three times as likely to interrupt women as they are to interrupt other men
- When women do interrupt, they interrupt other women 87% of the time

When you notice someone being cut off in a meeting, step in kindly but firmly to redirect the conversation back to them. You could say something like:

- “Let’s pause for a moment – I’d like to hear [Name] finish their thought.”
- “I’m really interested in hearing the rest of [Name]’s ideas before we move on.”
- “Let’s circle back to [Name]. I think they were about to make a great point.”

Having simple phrases at your fingertips can help you respond confidently in the moment. By intervening, you’re not just addressing the interruption – you’re interrupting bias and role modeling allyship in action.

5 Listen To Those Who Speak Up

When someone shares a difficult or uncomfortable experience with you, how you respond matters. Dismissing their concerns - whether intentionally or not - can invalidate their feelings and discourage them from speaking up in the future.

When a colleague comes to you with a concern, start by believing them, even if their experience differs from yours. Listen without judgment, and ask thoughtful questions to better understand their perspective.

For example, if someone shares that they felt excluded during a team event, resist the urge to brush it off with, "I'm sure they didn't mean it that way." Instead, try, "I'm sorry that happened - can you tell me more about what made you feel that way?" This approach validates their feelings and shows that you're genuinely interested in understanding and supporting them.

If they face skepticism or pushback from others, be courageous in your support. Stand by them and help amplify their voice if needed. Ask how you can help - whether it's addressing the issue directly, finding resources, or simply being a sounding board.

By creating a safe and supportive space, we empower others to speak up and help foster a more respectful workplace for everyone. Let's all be allies who listen, believe and take action.

6 Lend Your Time & Enthusiasm to ERGs

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) play a vital role in creating inclusive workplaces, offering support and advocacy for underrepresented groups. But sometimes, these groups face challenges in filling leadership roles or finding volunteers to help with their initiatives.

Here's where allies can make a real difference. You don't need to belong to a specific demographic to contribute meaningfully to an ERG. For example, if your company has a Women's Network, you could volunteer to help organize events, manage communications, or advocate for its initiatives - even if you're not a woman yourself.

Allies are needed to lend their time and skills to ERGs at your workplace. Your involvement not only eases their workload but also demonstrates your commitment to fostering inclusion and equity.

Supporting ERGs isn't just about helping - it's an opportunity to learn, build connections, and champion meaningful change in your workplace.

7 Be a Career Changemaker

A real-time acknowledgement goes a long way to help someone see their full potential. Many people, especially women and underrepresented employees, may not realize they're ready for a bigger opportunity - or may hesitate to pursue it without encouragement.

If you witness a colleague's brilliance in a presentation, team meeting or project - pause and publicly acknowledge them for it. Privately, you may even want to suggest that they are ready to take on more and cheerlead them towards bigger opportunities or visibility.

A comment like, "You'd be great at leading this project - have you thought about putting your name forward?" or "I think you'd shine in that role; I'm happy to help you prepare if you're interested," can boost their confidence and open doors they might not have considered.

Your belief in their abilities could be the spark they need to take the next step in their career. Let's empower others to dream bigger, aim higher, and grow into the opportunities they deserve.

8

Take on the Broken Ladder

Despite some progress for women in the workplace over the years, many still face barriers, particularly when it comes to advancing into leadership roles. This issue is especially pronounced for women of color, who often encounter a “broken rung” on the ladder to management.

One common bias is the tendency to judge women based on their past experience, while men are often promoted based on their potential. For example, a young woman might be told, “She’s not quite ready to take on a leadership role yet,” even though she’s been excelling in her current responsibilities. On the other hand, her male counterparts may be given more opportunities to step into leadership, with the expectation that they’ll learn as they go.

If you’re in a leadership position, take a closer look at how you’re evaluating employees for promotion. Are you consistently applying clear criteria? Are you considering each person’s potential, not just their past experience? Be mindful of biases that could prevent women from advancing and challenge them when you spot them.

9 High-Profile Opportunities for All

Not all work is created equal – some tasks can boost your career, while others are necessary but go unnoticed. High-profile assignments, in particular, can propel someone's growth, offering visibility and new opportunities. Unfortunately, not everyone has equal access to these opportunities.

Research shows that women, especially women of color, often have less access to these career-boosting assignments than their male colleagues. This disparity contributes to turnover and missed potential in the workplace.

As an ally, think about your decision-making when assigning high-profile projects. Are you unintentionally giving these assignments to the same people or types of people over and over? They might be people who currently look and sound like you, so expanding your selection pool can make a big difference in broadening diversity of thought and innovation. Look beyond your usual go-to list and consider others who may have the skills or potential to shine in these roles.

You might also think about how you can help more people develop the skills needed for such opportunities, so they're ready when the next high-profile assignment comes around.

10 Have a Go-To Response

When we hear offensive or inappropriate jokes, it can be easy to stay silent, especially if we're not sure how to react in the moment. But staying silent can imply that we're complicit with the behavior, even if we're not. As allies, it's important to speak up, disrupt bias and show that we won't tolerate comments that put others down or make them feel uncomfortable.

A great way to feel more confident when responding is to have a few phrases prepared ahead of time. If you have a few go-to responses in mind, you'll be ready to address the situation without second-guessing yourself.

Here are some suggestions for what you can say:

- "I don't get the joke, can you explain it to me?"
- "I'm not sure that's appropriate for this setting."
- "I don't think that joke is funny. Let's keep things positive."
- "Hey, let's be mindful of how that could affect others."
- "I'd prefer not to hear jokes like that."

Having these responses on hand can make it easier to step in and address the situation right away. Don't be afraid to use your voice – sometimes, that's all it takes to make a difference.

11 Recognize and Share the Load

Office housework – like taking notes, scheduling meetings, or cleaning up after events – often falls on women, especially women of color. While essential, these tasks don't typically advance careers and disproportionately fall to women. The result? Burnout, missed opportunities for growth, and unequal workplace dynamics.

Richard Branson's Take

At a dinner with executives, Branson not only brought up the issue – he took the meeting notes himself. His point? Sharing these “invisible tasks” benefits everyone. It's not just about fairness; it's about leadership. When everyone pitches in, we create a more inclusive and effective workplace.

How You Can Help Today

- **Notice and Act:** In your next meeting, observe who's consistently handling office housework. Offer to take on one of these tasks yourself or acknowledge the efforts of those who do.
- **Implement Rotations:** Suggest a fair rotation system for tasks like taking notes or organizing events so everyone shares the load.
- **Set the Example:** If you're in a leadership role, model equitable behaviors by volunteering for support tasks and encouraging others to do the same.

Small, consistent efforts like these can create workplaces where contributions are valued equally, and career advancement isn't hindered by invisible labor.

12 Give Honest Feedback

It's natural to feel hesitant when giving constructive feedback, especially if the person receiving it is different from you in some way. You might worry about coming across as insensitive or fear they'll misinterpret your intentions. As a result, you might soften the feedback or avoid it altogether.

But here's the thing: honest, constructive feedback is essential for growth. Holding back to spare feelings or avoid discomfort doesn't help anyone - it can even unintentionally hold someone back in their career.

Feedback can be both kind and direct. Focus on the person's work, behaviors, and achievements, and be clear about what they're doing well and where they can improve. Remember, the goal isn't just to point out areas for growth - it's to empower the individual to succeed and thrive.

By being thoughtful, respectful, and straightforward, you can build trust and create opportunities for meaningful development.



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