

Welcome to **Week 13** of the United Way of Greater Niagara and Niagara University **14-Week Equity Challenge!** This week, we explore the important question of what it means to be an ally in this work. One dictionary definition of ally is “a person or organization that cooperates with or helps another in a particular activity.” An ally seeks to understand what it feels like for another person or group to be oppressed, and despite knowing you will never fully understand how it feels, is committed to valuing and supporting people who are marginalized. In today’s society, the term has taken on a more urgent and active meaning, however it is often misunderstood or misused to imply good intentions, often without action or with action for unproductive reasons.

It should be noted right up front that not everyone is on board with the term ally or allyship. In fact, when asked way back in 2016 about the term allyship, Alicia Garza, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, stated, “I hate the word ally. I hate it. It just sounds good for me, it doesn’t mean anything ... I could say that I’m an ally to children in Sudan; but I’m not doing anything about what’s happening to children in Sudan. And so it just lacks meaning. What does it mean to be an ally to me; I want a co-conspirator. I want somebody in this with me, to say, I don’t know either, but let’s figure it out. And here is what I am bringing to the table.”

What Garza is referring to is what is called “performative allyship,” the act of outwardly appearing devoted to a cause while declining to take any major actions to support it. As described in the Forbes article below, with authentic allyship there is an obvious, and genuine attempt, to transfer the benefits of privilege to those who lack it, in order to advocate on the marginalized group’s behalf, and support them to achieve change. Performative allyship, by contrast, is where those with privilege, profess solidarity with a cause. This assumed solidarity is usually vocalized, disingenuous and potentially harmful to marginalized groups.

Allyship is not just a verbal commitment to do better, it is a commitment to fundamentally undo our own biases and systematically inequitable structures and intentionally come alongside our communities of color in action. Allyship is about affirming that a person belongs, that they are valuable, and that you support them. Allyship is about recognizing our privilege, addressing our knowledge gaps, and taking steps to actively rewrite our inner scripts around race, bias, and inclusion. Allyship requires action and accountability.

Some leaders in the racial justice space see allyship as the beginning of a continuum. Allyship is the thinking and learning stage. After allyship comes the accomplice, someone who is actively working to dismantle systems of injustice and oppression but may not have any relationships with colleagues of color or include colleagues of color in the conversation. Allies are folks who stand with someone who is confronting an obstacle – accomplices help people tear down the obstacles by taking action. As allies/accomplices, it’s important to take the lead from the person or group we are trying to assist, and to be ready to step in when they need us through deliberate action, and that may mean taking a step outside of one’s comfort zone. In some cases, as Vu Le discusses in his article, on occasion, yes, you can do the most good in the struggle for a better society by not participating in certain things.

The final step, co-conspirators, work alongside the communities they seek to uplift. They work with colleagues of color or other marginalized groups to listen, support, and ask how they can show up best for people already doing the work. At the core of this work is the need for people to feel connected, valued, seen and supported. As you go through your days, think about ways you can invite people in, hear their story, and create opportunities for belonging and partnership.

Ally or allyship can be triggering terms for those who experience racism, oppression, and discrimination on a regular basis. Informed action is important for those who strive to be allies with marginalized people and communities. According to Amélie Lamont in her [guide to allyship](#), being an ally doesn't necessarily mean you fully understand what it feels like to be oppressed. It means you're taking on the struggle as your own, and adding your voice or action alongside those who are oppressed. Being an ally is not an identity, it is a continual process—something that you must work at, be intentional about, and commit to every day. Explore what active support looks like as an ally in "[Guidelines for Being Strong White Allies](#)," adapted from *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Social Justice*.

Being anti-racist is not a spectator sport, nor is it an individual activity. It requires recognizing and owning the privilege that you hold, to help carry the weight of oppression for, and in collaboration with, others. In order to create true racial justice, we must move toward more action-oriented roles. There is a place for each of us in this work. Check out the Dos and Don'ts, and helpful tips to becoming a better ally in the resources below.

It is important to note that some of the very good resources offered this week (in particular, Chescaleigh's brief video of 5 Tips and the discussion of allyship on NPR's Code Switch) occurred well before the killing of George Floyd. In fact, it is worth noting that, while most people understand Black Lives Matter to be a response to the killing of George Floyd, this year BLM celebrates its tenth anniversary. That said, for obvious reasons, in the past few years, allyship has taken on a greater sense of urgency and has assumed a much more high-profile place in our daily lexicon.

In addition to our content for this week, you can find additional resources at the University at Buffalo's library under Equity & Social Justice Advisory Group Resources: Allyship, linked [here](#).

READ

[Advice for White Allies Going Through Existential Crises while Doing DEI Work](#)

Among the thoughtful allies, many are going through a different sort of existential turmoil; one where they must figure out what their role is in the work, where they can contribute while still advancing equity, and also whether removing themselves from various spaces would actually be most helpful. In this article from 2022, Vu Le shares some advice that leaders of color have said. Vu wants to reassure you that you're needed in the fight for a just and inclusive society, if you're willing to do your part. (About a 4-minute read)

[Performance Allyship: What are the Signs and Why Leaders Get Exposed](#)

Performative allyship is becoming the order of the day, with many professing support for marginalized groups. It has become a recurring theme in recent times, with many in leadership positions quick to lend rhetorical support to diversity and inclusion, particularly in the area of race equality. (About a 9-minute read)

[Allyship – The Key to Unlocking the Power of Diversity](#)

Wishing to be a better ally in the workplace? Looking for a place to start? In this commentary, Sheree Atcheson, a global changemaker in pushing for equality in industry, discusses how to be a better ally in the workplace. She recommends starting by taking time to really listen to the experiences of those around you. (About a 4-minute read)

[A Guide to How You Can Support Marginalized Communities](#)

This short article summarizes some ways to be an ally and support marginalized communities. (About a 3-minute read)

[Allyship \(& Accomplice\): The What, Why, and How](#)

Go further and learn more about the difference between an Ally vs. Accomplice in this piece published by Medium, an open-access publishing platform that offers insightful and dynamic thinking. The piece is written by Michelle MiJung Kim who identifies as a queer, immigrant, Korean American woman who is “navigating this world as a writer, activist, and entrepreneur.” (About an 8-minute read)

WATCH

[5 Tips for Being an Ally](#)

You might recognize Chescaleigh from previous weeks' content where she tackled a variety of different issues on her MTV news web series called Decoded. Here, "way" back in 2017, Francesca Leigh Ramsey is solo and offering 5 tips for being an ally. As one person commented, "I feel that this is possibly the clearest, most respectful, and most accessible explanation for being allied with, while being an ally to a group that anyone might not be directly a member of." (About 4 minutes)

[Allyship at Netflix](#)

An ally seeks to understand what it feels like for another person or group to be oppressed, and despite knowing you will never fully understand how it feels, is committed to valuing and supporting people who are marginalized. This brief video does a good job clarifying what an ally is. (About 3 minutes)

[Allyship at Work](#)

If you have a little extra time, watch this presentation by Dr. Ursuline Bankhead that was given in May 2022 at the University at Buffalo Law School just a couple weeks after the mass shooting in Buffalo. "Allyship" has been used in support of the LGBTQ population, various racial and ethnic groups, women, and other marginalized populations. But what does it really mean? Dr. Bankhead is the Psychology Chief/Assistant Chief of Mental Health and Chair of the Health Equity Committee for the VA Western New York Healthcare System. (About 58 minutes)

[Alicia Garza: Ally or Co-Conspirator?](#)

In June 2016, as part of Move to End Violence, Jesenia Santana of the NoVo Foundation sat down with Alicia Garza to discuss her reflections and experiences in feminist movement-building and ending violence. Part 3 of a 5-part series. (About 3 minutes)

[A Conversation Between Michelle Alexander & Angela Davis](#)

For anyone who has been doing this work for a long time, you likely know who Angela Davis and Michelle Alexander are, two titans in the social justice movement. Prior to this 2017 interview at Union Theological Seminary, the two had never met. The entire interview is very powerful, however, we would just like to draw your attention to the 1 hour 17 minute mark of the video; when a young man in the audience asks Dr. Davis about her thoughts on allyship. (About 8 minutes)

LISTEN

[Safety-Pin Solidarity: With Allies, Who Benefits?](#)

Listen to NPR's Code Switch and examine the complexities of allyship. Explore how you feel after listening to the 30-minute podcast. How can you improve your allyship or support allies? (About 31 minutes)

[How to be an Ally for Colleagues of Color at Work: Three Do's and Don't's for Taking Action:](#)

In the wake of George Floyd's death, many white leaders rallied to fight racism and build inclusive organizations. We ordered (and sometimes read) books on being an anti-racist; we attended webinars and protests; we talked in exasperated tones about how this change had been too long in coming. But have we really helped to move the needle? Here are three simple "do's" and three simple "don'ts" that the authors have learned from colleagues of color that may be helpful. (About 10 minutes)