

BREAD+ BUTTER

CULTIVATING ALLYSHIP IN THE WORKPLACE



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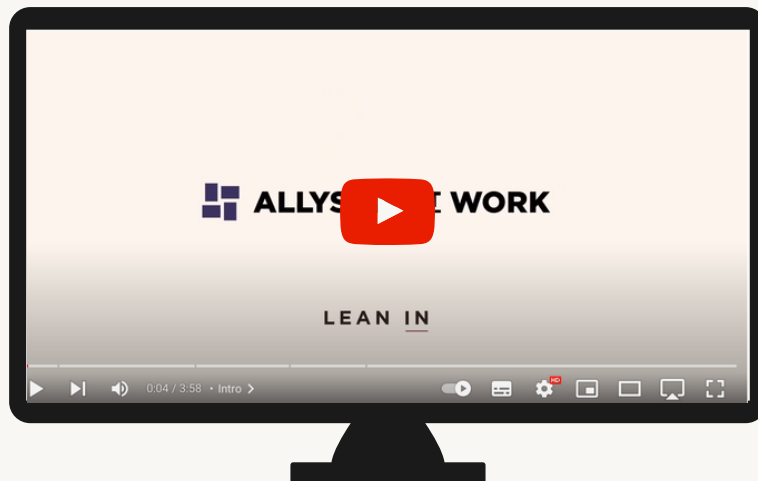
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WHAT IS ALLYSHIP?

Click to play!



At its core, being an ally requires a deep level of awareness around where you have rights, access and opportunities that others don't. It's complex and requires a willingness to constantly reflect, learn, discuss, understand and evolve. There are a few different definitions of allyship, but the most widely used one comes from Nicole Asong Nfonoyim-Hara, Director of the Diversity Programs at Mayo Clinic. She defines allyship as:

“When a person of privilege works in solidarity and partnership with a marginalized group of people to help take down the systems that challenge that group’s basic rights, equal access, and ability to thrive in our society.”

In the workplace this means working together with people from marginalised groups (such as LGBTQ+ communities, employees with a disability or those from racial and ethnic groups) to help take down the systems that challenge their ability to thrive.

WHAT ARE THE BUSINESS BENEFITS?

There are many benefits to cultivating allyship within your organisation.

The first, and arguably most important, is that it when people feel supported in this way and able to truly thrive, it impacts on their self-esteem, job satisfaction and general wellbeing. Secondly, by enabling everyone to contribute equally and share their expertise, teams are able to make better decisions, boost creativity and innovative thinking.

Fostering allyship can also have positive impact on a company's HR metrics. According to research*, employees from organisations with strong allyship are 50% less likely to leave, 56% more likely to improve their performance, 75% less likely to take a sick day and 167% more likely to recommend their company as a great place to work.

According to a 2023 Japanese market survey, companies recognised for their allyship initiatives enjoyed an 18% increase in customer loyalty.

*Elevating Allyship in the Workplace. A Curated Research Report by The Centre for Women and Business at Bentley University



WHAT IS PRIVILEGE?



The first step in cultivating allyship is to help your employees understand their privilege and how they can use it to help others. In order to do that, they will need to fully understand the concept of privilege and accept that they have it to some extent.

Privilege, in this context, goes beyond financial background and socioeconomic status. It's actually about the systems of advantages one has been granted because of certain aspects of their identity (for example their gender, sexuality, race, age or first language). It's not about who one is as an individual, but about which groups they belong to and how these groups are viewed and treated by society.

Generally within society, there are considered to be **dominant groups**, who will experience more privilege, and **non-dominant groups** who will experience less. On the next page we will outline some examples and explain how encouraging employees to recognise the groups they belong to can help them on their allyship journey.



RECOGNISING OUR PRIVILEGE

Here are some examples of dominant and non-dominant societal groups:

Dominant groups include:

- Male
- Heterosexual
- White
- Non-disabled
- Christian
- Under 40 years of age



Non-dominant groups include:

- Female/Trans/Non-binary
- LGBTQ+
- Black/Asian/Mixed race
- Disabled/Neuro-divergent/Chronic illness
- Muslim/Hindu/Jewish/Other
- Over 40 year of age

Consider asking your employees; which groups do they belong to? What surprises them about the amount of privilege they have? What does this exercise show them about who needs their support as an ally?



It's important to note that elements of our identity often interact with each other (e.g. someone may be black and female or white and gay) which has a unique impact on the opportunities we have at work or in society as a whole. This is known as **intersectionality** and is an increasingly important topic for leaders and businesses to understand.

[MORE ON INTERSECTIONALITY](#)



THE ROLE OF AN ALLY

Once employees accept and understand their own privilege, they're in a stronger position to start using it to be an ally for others who may not have the same access and opportunities.

In this section we are going to uncover the 7 different ways in which an employee could be an ally and the specific actions they could take to fulfil these roles. First however, we must touch upon what it means to be a performative ally and how this can be extremely damaging.

Performative Allyship:

Performative allyship in the workplace is when employees disingenuously support marginalised groups to make themselves appear as an ally, possibly for some kind of personal gain. As defined by the University of Kent they “are allies only in name. Their ”support” of marginalised groups is often just when it’s convenient for them and can actually be harmful to a group.”

Sometimes leaders will use performative activity in a way that they believe will protect the company or themselves from being highlighted in a negative way. Many describe performative allyship as “talking the talk, without walking the walk.”

In contrast to this, authentic allyship can be practiced in a number of different ways. We explore 7 of these on the next few pages.



01

SPONSOR

“With power comes great responsibility” – Winston Churchill

Someone who is being a sponsor will support the work of their colleagues from underrepresented groups, particularly in situations that could help boost their profile and visibility.

How to be an effective sponsor:

- Talk about other people’s expertise in meetings.
- Recommend people from underrepresented groups for projects or learning opportunities.

CHAMPION

02

A champion acts in a similar way to a Sponsor, but their support is more public. They will willingly defer to colleagues from underrepresented groups in meetings or conferences.

How to be a champion:

- Publicly direct questions to those with subject-matter expertise.
- Push for people from underrepresented groups to speak at events or in company meetings.

ADVOCATE

03

An advocate uses their power to bring peers from underrepresented groups into highly exclusive circles. They recognise omissions and hold colleagues accountable for including qualified employees from all communities.

How to be an advocate:

- Look closely at the invite list for important meetings and advocate for those missing to be invited.
- Offer to introduce colleagues from underrepresented groups to influential people in your network.

AMPLIFIER

04



This ally works to ensure that marginalised voices are both heard and respected, for example, by looking at how they are represented within communications.

Employees can be an Amplifier by:

- Repeating good ideas put forward by others whilst attributing credit to them e.g. "I agree with Emily's suggestion to...".
- Inviting colleagues from underrepresented groups to speak at meetings or send company-wide emails.

05

SCHOLAR

A scholar will seek to learn as much as possible about the challenges and prejudices faced by colleagues, without inserting their own opinions, experiences or ideas. They do their own research, listen and learn.

How to be a great scholar:

- Explore learning materials on ED&I (start with those at the end of this e-booklet).
- Ask colleagues about their experiences.

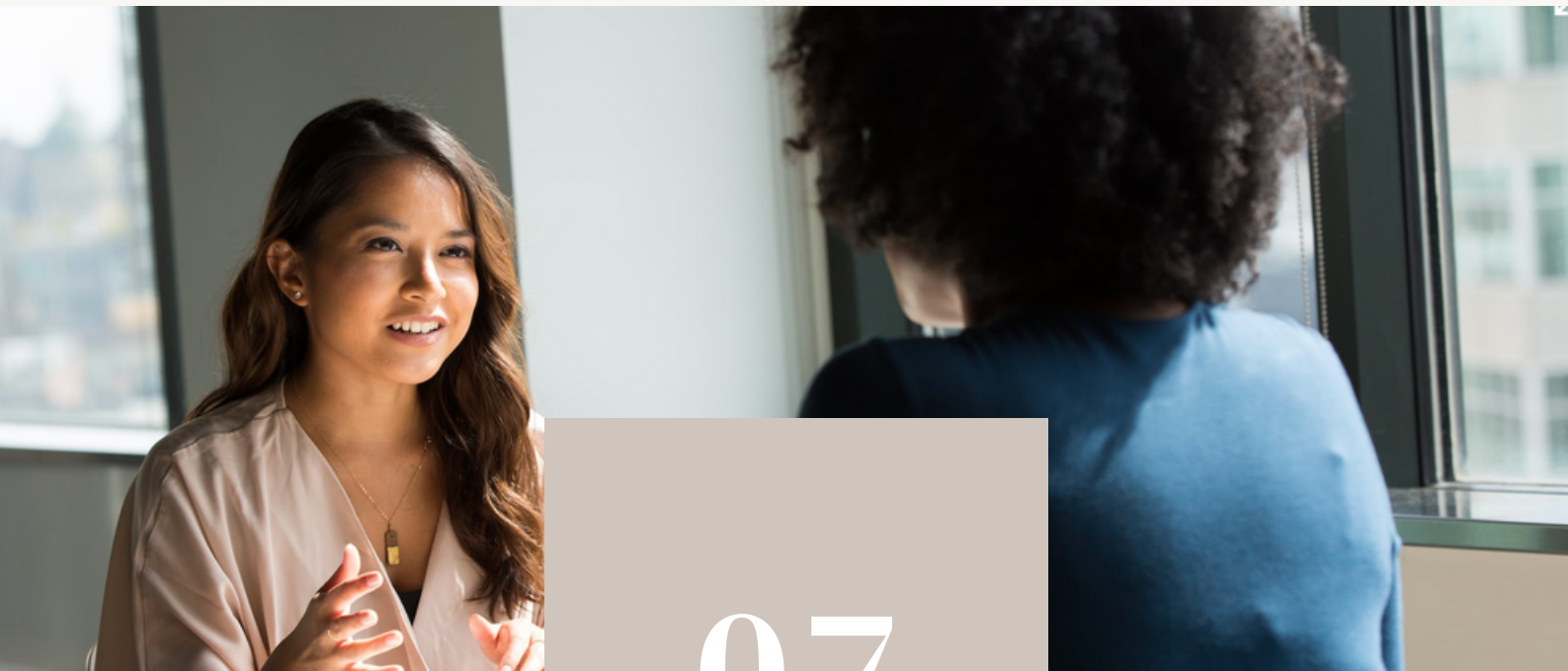
UPSTANDER

An upstander is the opposite of a bystander. They see wrongdoing and take actions to combat it. This ally will highlight if a joke or comment is offensive in a sensitive way.

How to be an upstander:

- Speak up if you witness offensive or exclusive behaviour.
- Check in privately with people who might have been made to feel uncomfortable and ask them if they would like your support.

06



07

CONFIDANT

This ally creates a safe space for members of underrepresented groups to express their fears, frustrations and needs without repercussions.

How to be a good confidant:

- Listen, without judgement, to other peoples' experiences.
- Ask open questions without adding in your own opinion.

“Allyship is not an identity. It’s a practice.”
– *Steph Viera*

PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY



As mentioned already, cultivating allyship is a journey that requires constant effort, learning and growth, but as we evolve, we are bound to make mistakes. Creating a safe space where mistakes can be made and seen as a learning opportunity is crucial if you want to embed allyship into your company culture.

The key here is to make sure that employees know how to respond and apologise in the right way if/when they do something that upholds the oppression of marginalised groups. As explained in the video above, a good apology includes **taking responsibility** for ones actions and then making a **commitment to change** the behaviour.

Apologies such as this can and should be role modelled by senior leadership in order to create real and long-lasting change.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Videos

- [Inclusive Mindset](#)
- [5 tips to being an ally](#)
- [What is intersectionality?](#)
- [Building a psychologically safe workplace](#)

Podcasts

- [Diversity: Beyond the Checkbox](#)
- [Intersectionality Matters!](#)

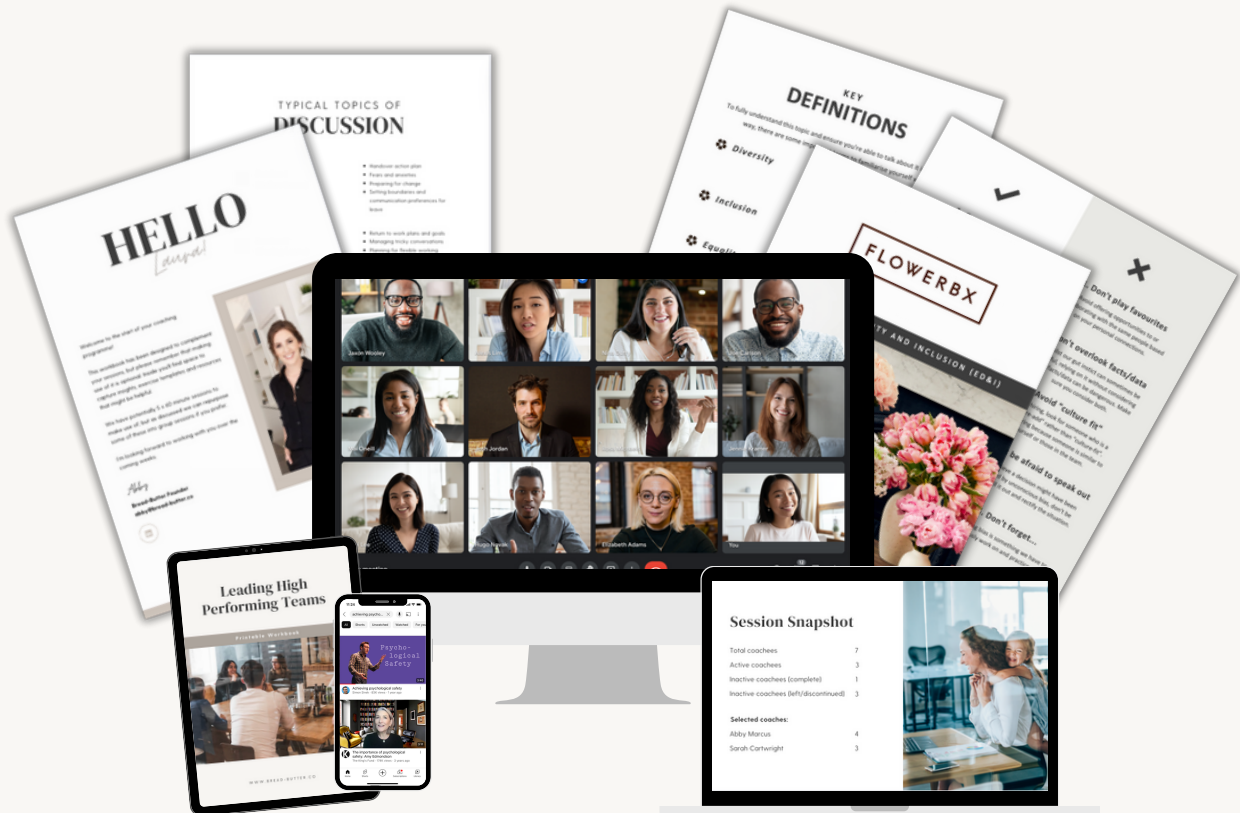
Articles

- [Bring your whole self to work](#)
- [7 Examples of Micro-aggressions in the Workplace](#)
- [Rochester Racial Justice Toolkit](#)

Books

- [Why I'm no longer talking to white people about race](#)
- [Invisible women: exposing data bias in a world designed for men](#)
- [Straight Jacket: Overcoming Society's Legacy of Gay Shame](#)
- [Untypical](#)

ABOUT US



We are **Bread+Butter** and we're helping businesses create better, more inclusive, working environments for their people. We do this by developing and facilitating online and in-person **workshops, coaching** employees who need extra support and by creating **learning resources** like this one.

If you'd like to find out more about us and what we do please don't hesitate to get in touch.

[GET IN TOUCH](#)

