

# 5 Steps To Become a Better Ally in the Workplace

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## Who is an Ally?

An ally is commonly [defined](#) [as](#) someone who is not a member of a marginalized group but takes action to support that group. In her Ted Salon Talk, [3 Ways to Be a Better Ally in the Workplace](#) [Melinda Epler](#) defines allyship as “really seeing the person next to us and the person missing. Who should be standing next to us? First, knowing what they're going through, and then, helping them succeed and thrive with us.”

Put simply, everyone has the opportunity to be an ally in the workplace, but it can be easier to call yourself one than it is to practice the act of allyship. In this article, you will learn five

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## 1. Understand privilege

Becoming a better ally starts with understanding how you might experience privilege in the workplace and then using that privilege to support and grow others. A common misconception is that being a person of privilege means that you come from a wealthy background. When beginning to understand your privilege in the workplace, it helps to first think about what rights you have that others don't.

Privilege, as [defined](#) by the National Association of School Psychologists, refers to the “unearned advantages that someone receives by identifying or being born into a specific group and that these advantages have not been learned by own hard work but rather their affiliation.”

Consider some data that may help you better understand how you might experience privilege in the workplace:

- [One-in-four black workers](#) report discrimination at work
- During the first half of the pandemic [54% of latinos](#) said they experienced some form of discrimination and that number jumped up to 64% for latinos with darker skin.
- About [eight-in-ten](#) Americans say there is a lot or some discrimination against Muslims in their society
- Women working full-time in the U.S. make [83% of what men make](#) and the gender pay gap is largest for Latinas who earn only 55 cents on the dollar.

Once you start to understand how you might experience privilege in the workplace, you can take the next steps to learn more about the experience of marginalized groups.

## 2. Stop and listen

To become a better ally, consider making efforts to gain an understanding of the workplace experience of marginalized groups. As in most educational environments, the best way to truly learn is to do the work yourself. Take ownership of your education and try to find resources independently without relying on others to teach you.

When speaking about the current Black Lives Matter movement, LaFawn Davis, Vice President of Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging at Indeed [says](#), “Marginalized people are not required to educate you as an ally. It is not their job. So in the case of what's happening with the Black community, don't reach out to your Black friends and colleagues and peers and ask them what you should do. They're already holding a heavy burden of their own feelings through this and protecting themselves through this so the best thing you can do is educate yourself. Google is your friend.”

Try seeking out your company's resource groups to see what resources are available and recommended for educating yourself and become a better ally in the workplace. Consider attending a group meeting and listening to the experiences of others. You may have the

opportunity to ask thoughtful questions that will help you better understand the experiences that you haven't dealt with firsthand.

As you listen, be prepared to learn that you might have been wrong in the past, either in actions or with preconceived notions. If that's the case, it's OK to admit that you've been wrong. Take note, learn from your missteps, and apply those learning to situations in the future.

Other activities you can do to educate yourself include reading publications, watching documentaries or listening to podcasts that describe experiences of underrepresented groups within your industry.

### **3. Ensure all voices are heard**

Another way to demonstrate allyship in the workplace is to create a space where all voices are heard. In the Women in the Workplace 2022 study, [31%](#) of women say that they have had their judgment questioned in their area of expertise during the normal course of business.

Work meetings can be hot spots for microaggressions toward underrepresented groups—examples include being interrupted while speaking, having ideas immediately dismissed or being completely ignored.

One tactic workplace allies can use to support a more inclusive environment is by setting expectations at the beginning of the meeting that all attendees will be respected by speaking without interruption. An ally can set a positive example by not speaking when others are talking. If you hear that someone is repeating an idea that was previously presented by a colleague from a marginalized group, consider verbally attributing it back to the original person.

Another suggestion is for allies to defer to colleagues from underrepresented groups when they are the subject matter experts. This small act allows them to be heard and increases their visibility and credibility within the group.

### **4. Be a change agent**

Between 2011 and 2021, [924,878](#) charges were filed with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) involving multiple types of discrimination involving age, sex, race, national origin, religion and equal pay.

While this number may seem alarming on its own, the EEOC has estimated that up to [75%](#) of workplace harassment goes unreported. But being an ally in the workplace doesn't require you to submit a formal complaint—allies can take small actions that can have a big impact. Start by asking yourself, "How can I help?"

For example, if you hear someone make a joke or comment that might be offensive to an underrepresented group, even if no one who identifies with that group is present, you could tell the person that their comment isn't OK and try to explain why. Having that kind of conversation may help that person avoid using hurtful language in the future.

Another suggestion is to look at who is participating in your meetings. In addition to noting who's present, pay attention to who's missing. Take steps to include teammates from underrepresented groups, especially if the situation would allow them to raise their credibility or reputation.

## 5. Thrive together

As an ally, you have the ability to amplify the voices and experiences of marginalized individuals or communities. While it can start with your company having unbiased recruiting processes, the impact of creating an inclusive environment has a significant impact on employee performance and tenure within a company. It's been [reported](#) that 55% of an employee's engagement in their work and 11% of their intent to stay at their organization is linked to feelings of inclusion.

It can also help to think about how the support of one group extends to others. Liz Elsen, director of the Gender and Sexuality Center at the University of [Texas at Austin](#), uses the example of the larger impact of workplaces having gender-neutral bathrooms. "All of our liberations are connected. While talked about as a trans issue, single-stall bathrooms help improve accessibility ... " for all people.

Allies have the ability to use their voice to promote active change in any community. Like Davis says, some of the best things allies can do are "sharing stories, sharing voices and sharing opportunities in this time and beyond."