

## Personal Qualities of an Effective Ally

**Knowledge of the oppression-** Allies understand the oppression in its various forms and contexts which allows them to recognize and address it. They are aware of how it impacts people from the oppressed group and from the dominant group, and how it intersects with other forms of oppression.

**Self-awareness-** Allies have insight into how their own socialization and experiences impact their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. They maintain vigilance about how their privilege, sense of entitlement, and internalized dominance gets enacted. This includes the ability to honestly self-reflect and assess their strengths and areas for growth.

**Accountability-** Allies develop relationships with people from the oppressed group and others from their dominant group to debrief and get honest feedback. They check in with themselves and others to ensure they are acting in ways consistent with their values and in solidarity with the efforts of the oppressed group.

**Non-defensiveness-** Allies are able to hear critical feedback and use this to continue their own learning and development as an ally. They can acknowledge mistakes and view feedback as “gifts” toward their growth.

**Humility-** Allies can let go of their internalized sense of superiority and value others’ wisdom and ways of doing things. They are able to work *with* people from the oppressed groups in equitable and supportive ways without needing to rescue or dominate. They are willing to admit what they do not know and continue to learn.

**Ability to choose appropriate action-** Allies are able to analyze situations and their own competence in order choose strategies appropriate to the situation. They recognize the power of collective action, rather than just individual efforts, for creating social change.

**Commitment to stay conscious and engaged-** Allies are willing to stay connected and keep doing the work even when it’s hard and uncomfortable.

**Courage-** Allies are willing to take risks and act outside their comfort zones.

## Barriers to People from Privileged Groups Working Collaboratively with People from Marginalized Groups

**Taking over.** Individuals from dominant groups are often in positions of power and have confidence in their knowledge, skills and ability to get things done. Add to this internalized (often unconscious) superiority. People from privileged groups can share their resources in ways that enhances rather than controls or diverts the group.

**Acting unilaterally.** People from dominant groups often feel they know what is best for people from marginalized groups and will make decisions and take actions without collaborating with and following the lead of the marginalized group.

**Wanting things to be done according to the norms of the dominant culture.** When people from the oppressed group get to set the norms, whether it be about communication, conflict, food, time, or process, it may be different from how the dominant group usually does it. This requires people from privileged groups to value other ways of thinking, being and doing. They need to be willing to be flexible and out of their comfort zone.

**Trying to be one of them.** Whether out of shame, lack of rootedness in one’s own culture or wanting to be accepted, people from privileged groups cannot pretend to be someone they are not. More likely, people will be seen as “wannabes”, making it more difficult for trust to develop. People from dominant groups can be sensitive to their enactment of privilege while being clear about who they are and their values.

**Seeking emotional support.** People who work together ideally can develop relationships that are mutually caring and respectful. However, people from the privileged group should not expect emotional caretaking from people from the oppressed group.

**Expecting to be taught.** People from dominant groups can learn a lot from working with people from marginalized groups. However, this can be done without looking to people from the oppressed group to teach them.

**Expecting gratitude or praise.** Everyone likes to feel that her/his efforts are recognized and appreciated, but as an ally in social justice work, that is not the purpose. Social justice work is done for one’s own and others liberation, not as charity or to be seen as a good person.

“The main goal [of allies] is to develop relationships of solidarity, mutuality and trust, rooted in a praxis of intentional anti-racist thought, action, and reflection.” (Raible, 2009)

Adapted from: Diane J. Goodman, *Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups*, Routledge, 2011.