

ACTION-BASED ALLYSHIP

RESOURCE GUIDE

In the entertainment industry, what we create can shape perceptions around the world. This guide is meant to empower you with some tools and language to continue your learning journeys wherever you may be and to take action as an Active Ally through your daily interactions and your creative work.

UNDERSTANDING ALLYSHIP



Definition: **Allyship**

- **Allyship is not** about seeking recognition for your efforts, or a one-time event or training you take.
- **Allyship** is a *lifelong process* of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability.
- **Allies** willingly work with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people and accept the risks involved. This process is most impactful when we move towards an **Active Allyship mindset**.

ALLYSHIP IN ACTION

Listen Actively and Empathetically

- Listen without thinking about how you are going to respond.
- Investigate knee-jerk reactions or instinctual discomfort.
- Center the other person's perspective and needs.
- Even if you have your own ideas about what someone might need, check on consent (e.g., "I could help you speak to this person if you want, but please let me know if I'm off base and there is a better way I can support you.").

Continuously Educate Yourself

- Commit to ongoing self-education by reading books, articles, and attending workshops that address how to contribute to a more equitable and inclusive industry.
- Continue to listen to and learn from people from historically marginalized groups who write and speak about these topics.
- **Please note that self-education does not include asking those from historically marginalized backgrounds to educate you unless they offer or are compensated.**

Challenge Stereotypes and Microaggressions

Learn to recognize harmful stereotypes and microaggressions—instances where what someone says or does reinforces that a historically marginalized person is “the other”—whether in content, creative processes, or day-to-day conversations:

Educate Yourself on Harmful Biases and Stereotypes by learning and reading about their impact [here](#) and [here](#)

Create a Bias Mitigation Plan for Developing or Creating Content

Using a checklist of questions to ask yourself can help mitigate biases and stereotypes in creative work. Here are some to consider when creating content:



Character Development:

- Do my characters represent a range of backgrounds and perspectives, or do they all seem similar?
- When creating characters, do I find myself relying on common stereotypes or overused character traits?



Visual and Descriptive Elements:

- When selecting images or illustrations, have I considered whether they might reinforce any preconceived notions or stereotypes?
- Have I reflected on whether my descriptions and imagery may inadvertently exclude or misrepresent certain groups?



Storyline and Plot:

- Have I examined whether my storyline or plot unintentionally perpetuates any common biases or prejudices?
- Are there narratives I'm drawn to that might align with stereotypes without me realizing it?



Dialogue and Language:

- Have I reviewed my dialogue to see if it contains language or phrases that might be unintentionally rooted in bias?
- Do I notice any patterns in my writing where characters from specific backgrounds speak or behave in a singular way?



Cultural References:

- Do I find myself incorporating cultural references without fully understanding their context or significance?
- Have I thought about whether these references might perpetuate cultural stereotypes?



Avoiding Tokenism:

- Have I questioned whether my inclusion of diverse characters serves a genuine purpose in the story, or do they feel like they're there just to tick a diversity box?
- Am I willing to explore the backgrounds and stories of these characters more deeply?



Implicit Bias Awareness:

- Have I considered whether my personal experiences or beliefs might influence how I portray characters, develop storylines, visualize set design or hair and makeup, or lighting choices?
- Am I open to learning more about unconscious biases and their potential impact on my creative choices?



Diverse Representation:

- Have I thought about whether my content accurately reflects the diversity of the world around me?
- Do I actively seek out diverse voices and experiences to ensure my content is more inclusive?



Accountability Measures:

- Am I prepared to listen to feedback from my audience and consider whether my content may inadvertently perpetuate biases?
- How can I take responsibility for and address biases in my content, even if I didn't initially recognize them?

PERFORMATIVE VS. ACTIVE ALLYSHIP

PERFORMATIVE ALLYSHIP

Centers their own intentions and convenience.

Example:

"Ugh, I can't believe he said that to you in front of everyone on set! If I were you, I'd definitely say something to him or one of the Producers."

Claims allyship as an identity.

Example:

"Thanks for that feedback! However, I do feel that I understand these topics really well already because of the Inclusive Comms training I attended last week."

Engages in DEIA conversations to make their stance known.

Example:

"I understand how you feel, but honestly, I do think there's been a lot of progress made through our DEIA initiatives I've been working on."

After some self-education, considers themselves an expert and can be complacent.

Example:

"Oh, I actually was just reading about that culture and this script is totally fine. Our industry has come a long way, it used to be so much worse."

ACTIVE ALLYSHIP

Centers those most impacted. Willing to take on risk.

Example:

"I'm so sorry you had to deal with that. I can hear how frustrated and upset you are. If you're comfortable with it, I can bring this up with our Producers to make sure this doesn't happen again."

Sees allyship as a set of practices.

Example:

"I really appreciate you bringing this to my attention. I'll make sure to make some extra space for crew members to engage in our meetings more meaningfully in the future, starting with our production meeting tomorrow."

Actively listens to marginalized voices, avoiding jumping to respond.

Example:

"I appreciate you opening up about this, and I'm so sorry you experienced that on set. That must have been really difficult."

Fallible and constantly learning.

Example:

"I've just realized that in the script I've been working on, I unintentionally portrayed a certain culture in a stereotypical way. I didn't mean for it to come across that way. Let me take a try at revising my creative choices and consulting with others who might know better than me."

NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Having difficult conversations as an action-based ally involves a willingness to address uncomfortable issues, listen actively, embrace empathy, acknowledge privilege and bias, and take action to support positive change. These conversations are essential for dismantling systemic and personal biases, while always centering those most impacted.

Scenario Overview:

Shana and Alex are both writers on a new series, and while going over the pilot script, Shana notices a particular scene that raises concerns for her. She believes that the scene may unintentionally perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Recognizing the importance of addressing this issue, Shana decides to initiate a conversation with Alex.

Frame the Conversation

- Come into the discussion with compassionate curiosity. What can you learn from this?
- Begin by framing the conversation and naming that it may be a bit sensitive.
- Ask your colleague if they're open to receiving feedback.
- Express your intention to understand their viewpoint.

"I really appreciate the type of collaboration we have and the creative ideas we feel comfortable bringing to the table. If it's alright, I'd like to discuss something that might be a bit sensitive. Are you open to hearing some feedback?"

Engage With Compassion, Curiosity, and Respect

- Share your own observations.
- Ask open-ended questions that leave room for discussion (this might take some preparation).
- Actively listen.
- Emphasize that the goal isn't to cancel or embarrass anyone.
- Remain open to debate and to broadening your own perspective.

"I'm not sure you realized this but, I noticed that this scene involves characters acting in a way that perpetuates certain stereotypes. What was the intention behind that piece of the scene? I'm curious if there's another way in."

Find Common Ground

- Even if you aren't fully on the same page by the end of one conversation, name what you can agree upon.
- Recognize that these topics require continuous discussion.
- Intentionally offer to make time to circle back on this.

"While we might not completely align here, let's acknowledge where we do see eye to eye. I think we both agree that the project's success hinges on authenticity. Let's keep this conversation going. I think it will ultimately make the project better and exciting."

“Calling In” or “Calling Out” can be helpful tools for addressing biases and promoting growth and understanding between colleagues.

Calling In

- Address the issue in private, after the fact.
- Come in with questions and observations rather than accusations or assumptions.
- Centers discussion and exchange, leaves room for perspective shifts.
- Come up with a plan of action moving forward.

Example:

A director in a production meeting makes a joke about an older person on the team not knowing how to use a new technology on set. After the fact, you find a private moment with the director to ask what they meant by that comment and explain how it might have been received in a harmful way or reinforced a bias.

Calling Out

- Address the issue in the moment, even in front of others.
- Stops momentum of harmful behavior.
- Shuts down the conversation/exchange
- Brings attention to the issue at hand.
- Can lead to embarrassment and/or lack of further discussion.

Example:

In a casting session, a casting associate suggests looking to fill the role of a leading love interest only with women who have the “right” kind of figure and only provides examples of white performers. In the meeting, you name that this person’s suggestions was harmful and explain why. For instance, you might say, “I’m concerned about how that suggestion might perpetuate harmful stereotypes about what kind of performer can be a romantic lead. Can we consider a more expansive list of performers such as...”



This guide is just a start to support you as you continue to grow your allyship practice. It's meant to provide some tips and tactics to inspire action in the way that is most meaningful and applicable to you. It's through these actions, both in individual moments and at a systemic level that we can create shifts that reverberate throughout the industry and beyond.
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