

Leveraging Your Privilege as an Ally Tip Sheet

VisionSpring
Inclusion Learning Loop

Tips for Leveraging Your Privilege as an Ally

If you are in a situation where you have privilege, you have an opportunity to leverage that privilege to help and support others. Leveraging our privilege is a great way to serve as an ally. Allies can help amplify the message, break down barriers and secure support of the masses. Here are some things you can do to leverage your privilege as an ally.

1. **Understand your privilege and how you can use it** – It is often difficult to advocate for change without appearing self-serving or overly sensitive when you are among those affected by the non-inclusive behavior or the systemic structures that need to change. A first step to leveraging your privilege is to more deeply understand the benefits or advantages you enjoy as a member of a dominant group. Revisit the social identity wheel and the privilege checklist and spend some time thinking about where you have privilege and how you can use it. Remember, having privilege enables you to advocate for inclusion and equal rights without the stigma of being self-serving and allows you to point out injustices and inequalities in ways that can be heard and accepted by others in your group.
2. **Educate yourself and be prepared** – You’ve heard the saying knowledge is power. Nothing could be truer when considering your role as an ally. Take the time to educate yourself about your organization’s DE&I policies, about social justice issues in your community and gather as much information and supporting data as you can to support your position. The more prepared you are, the more confident and effective you will be in your role as advocate or ally.
3. **Role model inclusion** – As a person in a position of privilege you have an opportunity to role model inclusive behavior and can create a new standard, and others will follow suit. It is important that inclusion is evident in all our actions as well as our words.
4. **Get involved** – Disrespectful behavior in the workplace is demeaning, detracts from inclusion and threatens a person’s sense of safety and well-being. You can have a positive impact by refusing to tolerate disrespectful behavior and by stepping up and getting involved. You can respond to negative behavior in a number of different ways ranging from simply raising awareness, defusing the situation more subtly, or addressing the source more directly and explaining why the behavior was problematic and what they might do to make amends.
5. **Have an open mind** – To be an ally takes patience and perseverance. Take time to process your emotions so you can begin the process with an open mind and a positive attitude. Take an honest look at yourself and your assumptions regarding the situation. Remain centered throughout the process, take a problem-solving approach and try to be open to the opinions and feelings of others. Above all, do not be combative but rather, approach the situation as an educator and peace maker.
6. **Drive systemic change** - Look for patterns associated with organizational norms that may minimize differences and limit the success of marginalized employee groups. Acknowledge these patterns with yourself, with your peers and with leaders in the organization. And finally, work with leaders throughout the organization to change these patterns and create a more equitable and inclusive workplace.
7. **Take a back seat** – Sometimes leveraging our privilege means giving someone else the opportunity to shine. In our workplaces that might mean stepping down from a board position to make room for a person of color, sharing your decision-making authority, silencing your own voice in order to give someone else the opportunity to speak, or advocating for systemic change that shifts dynamics of power and opportunity to traditionally marginalized employee groups.

8. **Use your voice to educate and support others** – As you become more comfortable in your role as ally and build your own skill and competency, you can begin to educate others in the organization.
9. **Build a coalition** – Advocacy typically comes with a fair amount of challenge and resistance. To be most effective look for fellow champions throughout the organization who can lend their voices to the cause. Ideally your coalition of fellow champions should include a diverse representation of people and should include coworkers from a variety of functions and levels. A team of advocates creates a more powerful voice and also provides practical and emotional support when resistance is at its greatest. Change can be a slow process and having support in place can be instrumental for the long haul.