

VEREDUS TALKS

International Women's Day

The seven steps of allyship

International Women's Day is an opportunity to reflect on the progress we've made toward gender equality, while acknowledging the work still ahead. As we celebrate the accomplishments of women worldwide, it's essential to recognise that true progress involves more than just celebrating achievements—it requires active participation in breaking down barriers and creating a more inclusive, equitable world for everyone. One of the most powerful ways to contribute to this cause is through allyship.

Allyship is an ongoing journey that helps us to become active participants in the fight for equality. It's not enough to simply acknowledge disparities; we must work to actively challenge and change the systems that perpetuate them. While allyship can take many forms, there's a general progression through stages that helps us better understand how to be allies and advocates for women and marginalised groups. Here's a breakdown of the allyship journey and how it applies to fostering equity in the workplace.

Stage 1: Awareness – recognising the inequities

The first step is awareness - noticing and acknowledging the disparities that exist - especially in workplace environments. For instance, you may observe that women are underrepresented in leadership roles or that certain voices are consistently overshadowed in meetings. It's about recognising the ways in which societal and systemic biases affect the representation, treatment, and opportunities of women.

In the workplace, awareness might mean noticing patterns: why are the majority of leadership positions held by men, despite having a diverse and capable team? Why is there a lack of women in high-level roles? This awareness is crucial, as it lays the foundation for change.

Stage 2: Education – learning about the issues

Once you're aware of the problem, the next step is education. This means actively seeking to understand the root causes of gender inequality - historically and in the modern context. Education involves reading books, attending workshops, and engaging with podcasts, articles, or discussions that offer insights into gender biases, women's experiences, and systemic barriers. It's important to listen to the voices of women leaders and learn from their journeys.

For managers and leaders, this might mean attending training sessions on gender equality, or even organising discussion groups to help identify the challenges women face in the workplace. Education helps create a deeper understanding of the structural inequalities at play and fosters a greater sense of urgency to act.

Stage 3: Self-Examination – acknowledging your own biases

Allyship requires self-examination. We must take a hard look at our own biases, privileges, and the unconscious ways in which we may be contributing to inequality. For many, it can be uncomfortable to confront our own biases, but it's a necessary step toward meaningful allyship.

For example, if you're a manager, you might realise that, without intending to, you've been favouring male employees for leadership roles because of your own biases. Recognising these biases allows us to better understand how our actions may inadvertently perpetuate the status quo. Self-examination is about taking responsibility for our own role in maintaining or challenging systems of inequality.

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Stage 4: Empathy and understanding – listening to women's experiences

The next stage is about developing empathy. Allyship is not about speaking for others; it's about listening to them and validating their experiences. Developing empathy means actively seeking to understand the challenges women face in the workplace and being open to the emotions and struggles they may share.

Spend time talking to female employees to better understand their experiences, frustrations, and aspirations. It's important to listen with an open heart and mind, refraining from jumping to conclusions or making assumptions. This stage is about recognising and validating women's lived experiences.

Stage 5: Building relationships – connecting and supporting women

Allyship is most effective when it's grounded in authentic relationships. Building trust and rapport with women in the workplace allows you to be a more effective ally. Allyship is not just about understanding the issues, but also about actively supporting women through mentorship, offering guidance, and creating space for them to thrive.

Make a concerted effort to connect with female employees, offering mentorship, career advice, and showing genuine interest in their professional development. Building relationships strengthens the impact of allyship and makes it more personal, powerful, and lasting.

Stage 6: Taking action – moving from awareness to change

Allyship is not just about learning and understanding—it's about taking concrete actions to challenge inequality. This is the stage where individuals take responsibility for creating tangible change in their organisations. It's about moving beyond passive support to active participation in dismantling systems of bias and inequality.

Action ensures that allyship translates into real, lasting change.

Stage 7: Advocacy – using your privilege to amplify women's voices

The final stage of allyship is advocacy. As an ally, you use your position and privilege to amplify the voices of those who are marginalised. Advocacy means speaking out against discriminatory practices, supporting policies that promote equity, and using your influence to create opportunities for underrepresented groups.

Advocacy might look like pushing for inclusive hiring and promotion practices within your business, or speaking publicly to promote the idea that women should be given equal opportunities for leadership roles. Advocacy helps push the movement for equity beyond individual organisations and into broader societal change.

Keep it up!

It's important to remember that allyship is a continuous journey, not a destination. Even after reaching the advocacy stage, it's vital to keep learning, adapting, and evolving to better support marginalised groups. Allyship isn't static—it requires ongoing commitment and a willingness to reassess and adjust our behaviours as we grow and learn.

On this International Women's Day, whether you're a manager, a colleague, or an individual contributor, your role as an ally is essential in creating lasting change.

