

CALLING IN AND SHOWING UP

Five Steps to Being an Effective Ally

By Betsy Avila



As socialists, we believe in solidarity. We know that an injury to one is an injury to all. But how do we practice solidarity in our everyday lives and in our campaigns? If you've ever wondered why your local chapter only attracts a certain kind of person, ask yourself how you can become a better ally to the people you want to work with. The DSA National Office, with the Young Democratic Socialists, is field-testing a workshop to help members of locals become better allies so that we can build a stronger movement to change oppressive institutions and social structures. What follows is a brief outline of the steps you can take on your own or in a group to begin the process.

Pick any identity group to which you do not belong and try the following:

Self-reflect: What thoughts or prejudices might you have regarding an unfamiliar identity or issue? Admitting ignorance or prejudice on an issue or experience is an important step toward being a good ally.

Self-educate: Take the initiative and search for books, media channels, articles and blogs written by people with different voices. It's not up to oppressed people to educate you, although some may be willing to do so at the right time and in the right place. Find out where you can learn about alternative viewpoints on the radicalized history of the United States. Whichever route you take, at this point it's important to listen most of the time.

Get active: The best way to be an ally is to show up. Taking part in coalition work and public actions like marches, rallies, and boycotts directed at fighting oppression and discrimination is critical. Movements always benefit from added voices and bodies. Ask what the group needs from you. You can lend additional support by organizing others like yourself to join the action, too. Be sure to practice listening in these settings as well. This means keeping an open mind, not just thinking about what you'll say next.

Lead by example: Not everyone is politically correct or sensitive to the reactions of others around them, but a strong ally stops oppressive behavior in its tracks. Do your best to stop oppressive language and discriminatory practices in group settings as well as in one-on-one conversations. Developing new group practices when facilitating meetings, such as progressive stack, which means that the people who usually hold back get to speak first, goes a long way toward making sure everyone's voice gets heard. Encourage others to speak up when they hear something that makes others uncomfortable, and stop harmful behavior or

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language immediately. Remember, if such an incident occurs, ***don't call out, call in!*** People's mistakes are not an opportunity to shame them in front of others. Reach out to them in private after a meeting or in a private conversation, and calmly explain to them why what they did or said was harmful. Doing this will help individual groups improve the culture of the group.

Take risks, learn, and keep going: No one can be a perfect ally overnight. Self-reflection, self-education, and self-correction take practice and persistence. When speaking up you may find yourself in a position where you yourself are called in. Assume good faith on the part of those who are calling you in. They want you as their ally. Listen carefully to constructive criticism and avoid being defensive, especially when this criticism is coming from a comrade. Together, we can learn to accept and celebrate each others' differences and develop a culture of acceptance everywhere. Being allies is key to creating a truly powerful organization.