Ally Skills Workshop

Leigh Honeywell
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http://frameshiftconsulting.com/ally-skills-workshop/

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Format of the workshop

- 15 minute introduction
- 40 minute group discussion of scenarios
- 5 minute wrap-up

SO SHORT!

2 hour-long workshop: most common complaint was "Too short!"

3 hour-long workshop: only a few complaints that it was too short

1 hour: I’m going to talk... a bit fast.

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Leigh Honeywell

Former Incident Response Manager at Slack

7 Microsoft bulletins, 2 advisories

Explained computers to lawyers at the ACLU

Now: https://tallpoppy.io
Leigh Honeywell

Founding advisor to the Ada Initiative
10+ years volunteer work with Geek Feminism, etc
Taught Ally Skills to 400+ people across the US, Ireland, and New Zealand. And during Defcon.

Leigh Honeywell
Let’s talk about technical privilege

We are more likely to listen to people who "are technical"

... but we shouldn’t be

"Technical" is more likely to be granted to white men

I am using my technical privilege to end technical privilege!

https://frYERZelic.kr/p/ CC BY @sage_solar
What is an ally? Some terminology first:

**Privilege:** an *unearned* advantage given by society to some people but not all

**Oppression:** systemic, pervasive inequality that is present throughout society, that benefits people with more privilege and harms those with fewer privileges
What is an ally? Some terminology first:

**Target:** someone who suffers from oppression (also called "a member of a marginalized group")

**Ally:** a member of a social group that enjoys some privilege that is working to end oppression and understand their own privilege

**Actions**
Example

Privilege: The ability to interview for a job and have the interviewer assume that if you have children, you will continue doing a good job at work

Oppression: Family members’ expectations that women take on most of the childcare, fathers using paternity leave for things other than childcare, belief that mothers don't want to return to full-time paid work
Example

**Target:** Any woman who wants to work for pay for an employer

**Ally:** A man who takes on significant childcare responsibilities, donates to women’s causes, uses paternity leave for childcare, speaks up at work against stereotypes about mothers, and reads news articles about privileges fathers enjoy and mothers don't
Can you act as an ally?

Depending on the situation, you may have some unearned societal advantages if you are:

- Certain ethnic/racial group
- Male
- Cisgender (more later)
- Straight
- Not disabled
- A legal resident or citizen
- Speak certain language(s)
- Specific ages
- Certain height/size/shape
- Not a mother
- Not a caregiver
- Educated
- Technically experienced
- Wealthy (can be earned)
- From an upper class family
- High caste
- And many more...
Why should allies take action more than targets?

"[...] Ethnic minority or female leaders who engage in diversity-valuing behavior are penalized with worse performance ratings; whereas [ethnic majority] or male leaders who engage in diversity-valuing behavior are not penalized for doing so."

David Hekman, Stefanie Johnson, Wei Yang & Maw Der Foo, 2016

Does valuing diversity result in worse performance ratings for minority and female leaders?
http://amj.aom.org/content/early/2016/03/03/amj.2014.0538.abstract
What this workshop is not

A certification, an apology, or a "get-out-of-jail-free card"

Representing anyone's employer or giving legal advice

Time to discuss whether oppression exists, is bad, should be stopped, etc.

http://geekfeminism.wikia.com

https://flic.kr/p/97JC
CC BY Mark Strozier

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Format of the rest of the workshop

Short guide to terminology
Basics of ally skills
Discussion guidelines
Group discussion of real-world scenarios
Wrap-up
Terminology

Using the right words is important ally work

See your handout before each scenario for details

bit.ly/allyskillshandout
What if I make a mistake?

Apologize, correct yourself, and move on.
Exception to "don't use" list of terms

Members of any marginalized group can agree to call themselves whatever they want.

But outsiders should not assume they can use the same terms.
Help us create a safer space

You may leave or return at any time, for any reason, without explanation

This workshop is not recorded

This workshop is designed to be voluntary

Please anonymize if you repeat sensitive stories

Share at the level of people you just met at a conference

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Basics of ally skills

Be short, simple, firm
Don't try to be funny
Play for the audience
Practice simple responses
Pick your battles
While you're trying to help one group, don't be:

- sexist
- homophobic
- transphobic
- racist
- ableist
- classist
- ageist
- body-shaming
- and don't describe people as sexually undesirable, unattractive, etc.

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Awkward...
DREADED GROUP CHOOSING TIME

Form groups of 4 - 6 people

Groups that are more diverse have better discussions

Changing groups at breaks is encouraged

Say your name, your position, and your pronouns (she/her/hers, he/him/his, they/them/their)

If everyone in the group has the same pronouns, tell the instructor
Preparing for group discussion

Choose a **gatekeeper** to interrupt people who are speaking too much and ask people who aren't talking as much if they want to speak.

Feel free to gate-keep the gatekeeper.

Choose someone to report out, and rotate this person each scenario.
A few more tips for group discussion

Avoid rules-lawyering: "But what if there was some specific highly unlikely circumstance in which this situation was not actually bad?"

If you're not sure of the situation, pick one (or more) interpretations and discuss it

Focus on **how to respond to incidents as an ally** in this specific incident, not as the target or in the general case
At a meeting you run, a person with moderate proficiency in English makes a suggestion, but no one picks up on it. Later on in the meeting, a person with high proficiency in English makes the same suggestion and is given credit for it.
Who is speaking in your group?

Who is speaking most in your group?

Is someone having difficulty being heard?

Are there patterns related to gender, race, age, or anything else?

How do these discussions compare to ones you have in other contexts?
Tip: Effective and just meetings

Good meetings have the following roles:

- Facilitator
- Timekeeper
- Notetaker
- Gatekeeper

https://frameshiftconsulting.com/speaking/#meeting
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A new person in your working group has a six-month-old baby. You are discussing which projects to assign to people, including one that is in her area of expertise and requires more travel than usual. A colleague says, “She won’t want to do all that travel with her baby.”
What Works for Women at Work

By Joan C. Williams and Rachel Dempsey

Four patterns of subtle bias, varying by race, ethnicity, appearance, etc.

1. Prove-it-again
2. The Tightrope
3. The Maternal Wall
4. Tug-of-war
Be persistent & patient

Often it takes multiple conversations with multiple people to solve a problem

Don't let someone shame or manipulate you into acting against your values

What is the power structure? Who can take action?

The reaction is more likely to be positive than you think if you are acting as an ally
A Black person in your community points out on social media that a conference in your community has all white speakers. Several other people criticize them for being too abrasive, aggressive, loud, out of line, etc.
Tone policing/The "tone argument"

When people speak up in support of oppressed groups, it makes people in the dominant group feel guilty and sad.

A common response is to ask the people speaking up to not hurt the feelings of the dominant group.

Often this uses the word "angry" and especially "tone".

http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Tone_argument

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Tip: Charles' Rules of Argument

1. Don't go looking for an argument
2. State your position once, speaking to the audience
3. Wait for absurd replies
4. Reply one more time to correct any misunderstandings of your first statement
5. Do not reply again
6. Spend time doing something fun instead

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A person in your field is brought in to give a presentation about their project. During the presentation, their slides include several “jokes” which rely on sexual innuendo. When they take a question from the audience, their reply also includes a “joke” about female reproduction.
Sexual objectification harms women more

Consider the context: systemic oppression and dehumanization of women

Objectification of women sets the stage for harassment and diminishment of women

Any "compliment" can be offensive if it comes from a place of superiority or gatekeeping

Helpful test: would you say this to your male CEO/ED?
Why talking about sex in technical communities can be harmful

Double standards for sex for men vs. women and gay people vs. straight people

Some racist stereotypes are about sex or genitals

Strong pressure to "be cool" about sex

Sex talk => objectification & harassment of women
Tip: Read Captain Awkward

Advice blog that answers questions on social interaction from an awkward, geeky perspective

Great for "How do I get someone to stop doing something without upsetting anyone?" type of questions (hint: someone is already upset)

http://captainawkward.com
Advanced ally skills

Set specific goals for yourself for next week/month/year

Treat ally actions as bare minimum expectation

Follow and support leaders from target groups

Follow your discomfort: if something makes you feel bad, find out more and understand why before reacting

When you make a mistake, apologize, correct yourself, and move on
How to get the Ally Skills Workshop

Email contact@frameshiftconsulting.com

Take train-the-trainers

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