



Southerners On New Ground

BEING AN ALLY/BUILDING SOLIDARITY

(Big thanks to Kai Lumumba Barrow for inspiration)

If we want to build a broad-based movement for justice and liberation, across many different communities we need to be present and accountable allies to people who experience different forms of oppression and different realities than us. Additionally, in order to understand power we have to understand how multiple oppressed communities are affected differently by domination systems. The following are some things to think about/debate/explore...

We Are Honest About Where We Are Coming From

As allies we do not pretend that we are more knowledgeable about the communities and cultures of others than we are. We are not fronting in order to hide our own insecurities.

Listen

Not just once. Not just today. Again and again to realities of others' lives that we have not felt and do not understand...

We Realize We Are All In A Context

As allies we recognize that we all live in a racist, sexist, classist, ableist, homophobic, transphobic, anti-immigrant and otherwise oppressive context (whew!)...it is part of us, and we are fish in water in relation to it. We often do not even know how bigoted we are being. While our internalized ideas are our problem, we recognize that the issues are bigger than us alone.

We Don't Rag On Other Folks Tryin' To Be Allies Because We Think We Know More

Just because we may have been working on our privilege issues for awhile, does not mean that the best way to show "how down we are" is by openly attacking folks who have our same privileges in meetings. If you are a white person, calling out other white people is part of your role—but it is also part of your role to talk to other white folk in a way that looks towards building a stronger force of anti-racist white folks. As a white person, it is not an act of solidarity with people of color to alienate every other potential white ally who walks in the room.

We Hold Each Other Accountable For Actions

At the same time, we must be willing to be uncomfortable and speak out against oppression. Since we haven't had to do this everyday in areas where we have privilege, it may feel hard at first. Remember that folks who live it every day constantly have to feel uncomfortable, and this is part of our role.

We Fight The System

Because we realize oppression is structural, we are willing to put our bodies, hearts, and minds on the line to fight for liberation for everyone affected by oppression. Not just those individuals we care about. We join organizations, speak out, and do the exciting and boring parts of what is needed in order to make change. We use our privilege where we can to advance liberation struggles.

Center the Movement, Not Your Individual Role

It is easy for people with privilege to make ourselves indispensable in organizations—as we have often had access to tools and skills that are very valuable to organizations (like middle class people having learned about accounting and grant writing, and using that skill). It is never wrong to bring our skills to an organization. At the same time we should always have a plan for how to share our skills with other leaders. Often those of us with privilege are used to getting a lot of attention and praise for our work, so we want roles in organizations that feed that habit. We must support oppressed-led organizations in whatever way we can. That means being willing to play roles of any size and any capacity. The organizing and movement come first, not our own egos.

We Center The Voice and Leadership of the Survivor and Oppressed Communities

This means we don't take over, don't assume we know best, and don't take up a lot of space in being an ally. We support the self-determination and leadership of people most directly affected by oppression. We make that radical shift in thought to believe that people are experts on their own lives and are the best leaders in the struggle for their own liberation. We offer what we can honestly and transparently and don't push secret agendas.

We Don't Rush Trust

A path to trust is the best we can hope for when building new relationships: all oppressed communities we work with share at least one quality: they resent assumed familiarity, especially from perceived (and real) outsiders. Trust takes time and experience; it is earned--not given. Don't try to rush the process.

Don't Confuse Power and Privilege

Raw power is the ability to change people's lives on a large scale; privilege is a system of run-off benefits to help keep people divided by bestowing favors and advantages on some. The President of the United States and the CEO of Wal-Mart has a lot of power. A rural, white person living in poverty in the South still has white privilege, but not a lot of power. Remember that privilege is best used in the service of building power. Guilt and shame are not helpful in building power, accountability and thoughtful action are.

Honor Others' Traditions, Don't Steal Them

While it is important to educate ourselves about people who we want to ally ourselves with, we need to be conscious of not crossing the line into cultural appropriation (taking on culture that is not ours). For those of us who spend a lot of time in oppressed communities where we are privileged, it can be easy to take on language, objects, and mannerisms that are not genuine and organic to us or how we grew up. This is not necessary or helpful in building genuine relationships—shared language is fine, mimicking others is not. Deep down, we know the difference.

We Realize We WILL Be Changed By The Process of Being An Ally

We do not go into the process of trying to be an ally to anyone thinking that our beliefs, vision, or habits will go unchanged. At our best, we allow our assumptions to be questioned so deeply that it shakes us to the core.

We Realize We Don't Change Just Because We Think We Should

What we believe and how we act are often two very different things. We realize that the deep changes that happen in all of us mean changing our thoughts, our hearts, our actions, and our lifestyles to live in a way that can undo oppression and re-make a world of liberation. In short, WE ENVISION A LIBERATED WORLD AND WORK TO CREATE IT.

**Have questions, need support or technical assistance on this tool?
Contact us at ignite@southernersonnewground.org or 404-549-8628**