

Working Assumptions and Guidelines for Alliance-Building_— By Ricky Sherover-Marcuse

Since, under present world conditions, everyone either is now, or has been, or will be at some time a target of social oppression, and since everyone is now, or has been, or will be in a non-target group in relation to some other group's oppression, alliance-building is for everyone.

Everyone of us needs allies, and everyone of us can take the role of an ally for someone else. The following guidelines are based on this premise. They should be equally applicable from the perspective of the target and the non-target group.

STRATEGIES FOR WINNING ALLIES

Assume that you and all members of your group deserve allies._

Assume that your liberation issues are justifiably of concern to all people outside your group._

Assume that people in other groups are your natural allies; assume that all people outside your group want to be allies for you and that it is in their interest for them to do so._

Assume that it is only other people's own oppression and internalized oppression that prevents them (temporarily) from being effective allies to you at all times._

Assume that your allies are doing the best they can at the present time, given their own oppression and internalized oppression. Assume that they can and will do better._

Assume that you are the expert on your own experience and that you have information which other people need to hear._

Speak from your own experience without comparing your oppression to theirs._

Assume that your experience is also an experience of victories; be sure to share these - as well as the stories of how things are hard._

Expect perfection from your allies; expect them to be able to deal with the "difficult issues" in your struggle.

Assume that allies make mistakes; be prepared to be disappointed, and continue to expect the best from them. _

Assume that you have a perfect right to assist your allies to become more effective for you. Assume that you can choose to do this at any time. Take full pride in your ability to do this.

STRATEGIES FOR BEING AN EFFECTIVE ALLY

Assume that all people in your own group including yourself want to be allies to people in other groups.

Assume that you are good enough and smart enough to be an effective ally. This does not mean that you have nothing more to learn.

Assume that you have a perfect right to be concerned with other people's liberation issues, and that it is in your own interest to do so and to be an ally. _

Assume that all people in the target group want you and members of your group as allies. Assume that they recognize you as such- at least potentially. _

Assume that any appearances to the contrary - (any apparent rejections of you as an ally) are the result of target group people's experience of oppression and internalized oppression. _

Assume that people in the target group are already communicating to you in the best way they can at the present time. Assume that they can and will do better. Think about how to assist them in this without making your support dependent upon their "improving" in any way.

Hint: think about what has been helpful for you when you were in the target group position. _

Assume that target group people are experts on their own experience, and that you have much to learn from them.

Use your own intelligence and your own experience as a target group member to think about what the target group people might find useful. _

Recognize that as a non-target person you are an expert on the experience of having been conditioned to take the oppressor role. This means that you know the content of the lies which target group people have internalized. Don't let timidity force you into pretended ignorance. _

Assume that target group people are survivors and that they have a long history of resistance. Become an expert on this history and assist target group people to take full pride in it.

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Become an expert on all the issues which are of concern to people in the target group, especially the issues which are most closely tied in to their internalized oppression.

Assume that making mistakes is part of the learning process of being an ever more effective ally. Be prepared for flare-ups of disappointment and criticism. Acknowledge and apologize for mistakes; learn from them, but don't retreat. _

Recognize that people in the target group can spot "oppressor-role conditioning"; do not bother with trying to "convince" them that this conditioning did not happen to you.

Don't attempt to convince target group people that you "are on their side"; just be there. _

Do not expect "gratitude" from people in the target group; thoughtfully interrupt if it is offered to you. Remember, being an ally is a matter of your choice. It is not an obligation; it is something you get to do. _

Be a 100% ally; no deals; no strings attached: "I'll oppose your oppression if you oppose mine." Everyone's oppression needs to be opposed unconditionally.