

# Ally Skills Workshop Facilitator's Guide

Materials available at:

<http://frameshiftconsulting.com/ally-skills-workshop>

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**Last updated: 2023-04-15**

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## Introduction

This is a guide for facilitators teaching the Ally Skills Workshop, which is focused on simple everyday ways for allies to support people who are targets of systemic oppression in their workplaces and communities, including women of all races, people of color of all genders, people with disabilities, LGBTQ folks, and other marginalized people. This guide and the Ally Skills Workshop are designed and created by [Frame Shift Consulting](#), [Dr. Sheila Addison](#), the [Ada Initiative](#) and the contributors of the [Geek Feminism Wiki](#), and are licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-Sharealike 4.0 license](#).

## About the Ally Skills Workshop

Often, when we witness oppression, we are so busy being shocked and amazed that we can't quickly react. Other times we have plenty of time to react but can't figure out what to do, or we do something but it turns out to be more harmful than helpful. This is true even for people who have a lot of experience and education in supporting members of marginalized groups in their communities.

The solution is education and practice. By discussing real world scenarios and coming up with answers in a friendly environment, we have a better chance at responding in the real world. In the Ally Skills workshop, a facilitator leads participants in discussions about real world scenarios ranging from creating a friendly environment to confronting overt harassment. We also learn how to make long-term systemic changes to prevent bias or oppression from happening in the first place.

## Scope and audience

The Ally Skills workshop is focused on teaching people with privilege how to support members of marginalized groups in their daily lives by taking small, simple, everyday actions—and then learning to make systemic changes to prevent oppression in the first place. It is designed for people who are voluntarily attending the workshop, and who already agree that oppression exists, that it should stop, and that they personally would like to help end it. An "ally" in this context is someone who is taking action to help a marginalized group, but is not a member of that group themselves. We prefer the term "ally skills" instead of "allies" because it emphasizes that actions are what make a difference, not self-identification as a supporter by itself.

Members of marginalized groups often also attend the workshop, both to learn techniques for when they can act as allies and to contribute their experience of being marginalized to the discussion. The most successful workshops are 20 - 40% members of marginalized groups because of the first-person perspective and experience they can bring to the discussions. The scope of the workshop does not include teaching members of marginalized groups how to respond to oppression targeting themselves.

## **Facilitator preparation**

Teaching the workshop requires some specific speaking skills as well as specific knowledge about the history and present practice of oppression. Here are some steps you can take to prepare.

### **Identify your sources of privilege and power**

Use the "Identifying power and privilege" exercise from the workshop to figure out what situations you have an advantage in. Practice talking about your privilege and power until you can do so fluently and without obvious embarrassment. Pick a specific privilege to share with the class while introducing yourself, along with an explanation of how that privilege helps you fight oppression.

### **Prepare to share a story of making a mistake**

Showing participants that even the "expert" can make mistakes helps them feel more confident about taking risks themselves. Practice sharing your mistakes with others in a truly humble and honest way. Come to the workshop ready with at least one story of you making a mistake as an ally, and share it during the introduction.

### **Practice reframing questions**

Participants in the workshop will ask genuine and well-meaning questions of the form, "I believe this is the right thing to do, but can you help me understand why this apparent logical contradiction isn't true?" For example, when you ask for people to both treat women better AND to not single them out for special treatment, people might say, "I want to support women, but it's a logical contradiction to ask me to treat women better but also just like everyone else."

This confusion is usually the result of one or more of:

1. Incorrect facts
2. Ignoring systemic oppression
3. Putting the onus of change on marginalized/less powerful

You can help people understand where they went wrong by practicing reframing their question to include the true facts and systemic oppression, and to relocate the onus of change to the privileged and powerful.

Before we continue, an important caveat: Some people know they are making logical errors or basing arguments on lies and don't care. You can still use reframing techniques when responding to them, but you should play to an audience that is operating in good faith, not to the person acting in bad faith. (If there is no audience, you should respond only if you want practice with reframing, otherwise don't waste your energy.)

To reframe these questions, get in the habit of asking yourself these questions:

1. What assumptions are they making?
2. Are those assumptions true?
3. What systemic oppression is being left out?
4. Where is the burden of change placed?

When you do this, you can rewrite the question so that the answer is now obvious. Then you can kindly walk them through your reasoning process and the new information they need.

For example, when saying "I want to support women, but it's a logical contradiction to ask me to treat women better but also just like everyone else," some of the assumptions include:

- "Everyone" is "men"
- All men like this abusive culture
- What these men like defines "normal" behavior
- Men should not have to change to accommodate women
- Systemic sexism does not exist

Always look for hidden assumptions that society already treats two groups of people equally, or that two groups had equal starting places. In general, when someone asks a question that assumes the marginalized group is being treated better than the privileged group, you can assume that that is not true!

For this question, the true (reframed) assumptions include:

- "Everyone" includes people of all genders
- Many people dislike this abusive culture
- Women should be included in defining "normal" behavior
- Men should change to accommodate women
- Systemic sexism exists

When replying to someone acting in good faith and genuinely trying to learn, the first step to take is to affirm the validity of the question. This acknowledges their good intentions, and helps everyone feel like they are on the same side and makes others more willing to ask questions later. A few example phrases:

- "So let's talk about an underlying assumption a lot of us have about that..."
- "I hear you saying XYZ, what are some of the assumptions underlying that language?"
- "I also used to wonder that same thing, and then I learned..."
- "I used to think that, and then..."

In this case, the complete answer with reframing could be: "I used to think that too, because I thought that the way we were treating people was normal. But then I realized that our culture

was actually only friendly to men who didn't mind being part of abusive culture. When I changed my definition of normal behavior to be welcoming and inclusive of women too, then I realized that we could treat everyone with equal respect and also be more welcoming of women."

A more in-depth resource on this technique can be found at "[A post-election guide to changing hearts and minds](#)." To practice reframing, read Twitter replies, or political arguments on Facebook, and look for the underlying assumptions. Restate people's arguments but with more context.

## **Practice interrupting**

As the facilitator, it is your job to interrupt participants when they are speaking for too long, getting off-topic, or saying harmful things. Many people feel uncomfortable interrupting, so it is important to practice if this doesn't come easily to you. Here are some useful phrases to use when interrupting:

- "I'm so sorry, but I want to be sure everyone has time to speak. Could you summarize?"
- "I think what you're trying to say is X, is that right?"
- "I hate to interrupt, but we have to move on."
- "Can we take this offline?"
- "I'm going to interrupt you and ask you to follow up after the workshop, is that okay?"

At various other times in the workshop, you can also say things like:

- "I appreciate everyone keeping their report-outs short, so we can get through more scenarios."
- "Let's hold questions till the end."
- "I'd be happy to chat with you all after the workshop."
- "We're running a little low on time, so I'd appreciate only urgent questions."
- "Let's not interrupt people when they are reporting out."

## **Cultivate compassion and/or firmness**

An important part of leading a workshop is making people feel comfortable and understood when they ask questions or share their opinions (as long as they are acting in good faith and trying hard to be considerate). Another important skill is being firm and confident in your recommendations when you have done the work to back them up. Few people are naturally both compassionate and firm in the way necessary to lead this workshop, but we can learn to improve our skills in these areas and emphasize them while we are teaching the workshop.

<http://selfcompassion.org/> has many useful resources for developing self-compassion which makes compassion for others easier.

<http://www.mindful.org/a-loving-kindness-meditation-to-boost-compassion/> is another useful exercise for building compassion for self and others.

For developing confidence and firmness, we recommend reading the [Captain Awkward](#) advice blog and practicing scripts aimed at standing up for yourself, such as the "[broken record](#)."

### **Practice praising participants**

People are nervous about acting as allies and are more likely to do so if they have a positive experience in the workshop. Practice smiling and nodding while people are talking to you. Practice saying, "Those are good points," "Thank you for bringing that up," "I appreciate you mentioning that," "That was a good discussion," and similar phrases. When people say things that are good, say that they are good. When people say things that don't make sense or aren't helpful, strive to find something positive to say before you point out the downsides of what they just said.

### **Practice apologizing, correcting yourself, and moving on**

Teach by example by making a mistake, correcting yourself, and moving on. You should be doing this in your daily life—admitting you are wrong and swiftly moving on—but make a specific commitment to being conscientious about this. If you aren't in a lot of situations where you are making mistakes, you probably aren't learning new things or being as effective as you can be.

### **Practice admitting you don't know the answer**

The workshop covers a huge range of topics, and it's unlikely that any facilitator will know the answer to every question. Get comfortable with admitting you don't know the answer, while still affirming what you do know. Often, there is someone in the class who does know the answer and is willing to share. Be open to listening to this, but also ready to assert when you do know the answer. Some useful phrases:

- "I don't know."
- "I don't personally have experience with that, does anyone want to share theirs?"
- "I don't know off the top of my head, but I will look that up during the next discussion."
- "I'm not sure. Let me look that up and get back to you."
- "My guess would be X, but I am not sure about that."
- "Off the top of my head, that sounds good, but I'll do more research after the class."
- "Thanks for sharing your expertise. I will learn more about this after class."

### **Practice correcting good faith mistakes**

Often workshop participants will do or say something that they intend to be supportive of marginalized people, but ends up harming them instead. Often they are unintentionally patronizing, excluding, or reinforcing stereotypes about a marginalized group. Here are some examples of these kinds of comments:

- "Wow, he is so articulate!" [About a man who uses a wheelchair]
- "I really admire their bravery for wearing that in public at their size."
- "This year, we all just found out the true extent of racist police violence in the U.S."
- "I assigned that to him because he's better than everyone else at taking meeting notes."

Here are some ways to respond:

- "I know you meant to praise him, but I'm not sure if you realized that when people act surprised that he has a big vocabulary, it implies low expectations of his language skills."
- "I hear what you're trying to say, but a higher-weight friend of mine shared with me that people telling them they were brave for wearing tight clothes just made them feel worse instead of better."
- "I am so glad that so many more white people are aware of racist police violence now, but I'm also painfully aware that many people of color already knew about this because it was happening to them and their communities."
- "I agree that he's good at a lot of things, but I think it would be fairer for everyone to take a turn doing this, even if we're not all as talented as he is."

## Educate yourself

Here are some suggestions for further reading or watching:

- This guide (available at <https://frameshiftconsulting.com/ally-skills-workshop/>)
- Everything on the [Ally Skills Workshop handout](#)
- Ally Skills Workshop [video \(edited\)](#)
- [Dear Ally Skills Teacher](#) advice column
- "How to Talk to Your Boss About Race" by Y-Vonne Hutchinson
- "So You Want to Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo
- "Feminism is for Everybody" by bell hooks
- "Women, Class, and Race" by Angela Davis

## Preparing for the workshop

The workshop only works if the right preparation has been done in advance. Everything included in this section is important for the success of the workshop, so please don't skip any of it!

### Collect sign-ups in advance

In many cases, you will want to register people in advance for the workshop for several reasons: to get the right number of people for a successful workshop, so that you can screen unhelpful people out in advance, and so you can get the balance of members of privileged groups and members of marginalized groups. You should ask for the following information:

- Preferred name
- Email address
- URL where we can learn more about you (optional)
- Briefly, what are your thoughts on fighting oppression in [FIELD]? (or other screening question)

The new Google Forms seems to be bug-free and effective for creating this kind of form. Be sure to turn on the feature to send verifications of people's applications. EventBrite makes it hard to review the answers to the questions but is useful when you are charging on a per-applicant basis.

## **Workshop size**

The ideal workshop size is between 20 and 30 people, but the workshop can be run with lower quality with up to 50 people and as few as 5 people. With fewer than 20 people, not as many different ideas get explored during the discussion period in which participants split into groups of 4 to 6 people. With more people, the time to report out from each group becomes longer and limits the number of scenarios that can be discussed. If you have more than 30 people in a workshop, you will need to ask only a subset of the groups to report-out for each scenario (we recommend 5 to 6 at most). Choose the first group in order, then ask for volunteer groups who have something to add. We strongly recommend limiting the workshop size to 30 people.

## **Participation must be voluntary and in good faith**

The workshop is only as good as the people who attend it. The workshop only works when people attend it voluntarily, without external coercion such as an organizational mandate for everyone to take the workshop. Research shows that mandatory diversity and inclusion training actually reduces diversity: <https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail>

They must also be attending in good faith: they already agree that oppression exists, that it should stop, and that they personally would like to help end it. The workshop is not helped by the presence of people skeptical of the basic goals or people "playing devil's advocate." **If an attendee acts this way, it is your responsibility, as workshop leader, to ask that person to leave.** If you don't do this, you are reproducing oppression inside your workshop, giving marginalized people another experience of oppression, and ruining an opportunity for others to learn. One way to do this is to call an unscheduled break and ask them to leave privately during the break.

## **Avoid large power differences between attendees**

Creating an environment where people feel safe making mistakes and asking honest questions often means avoiding large power differences between attendees. For example, an individual contributor is probably not going to speak up as much if they are in the same group as the CEO of the company. A good rule of thumb is that individual contributors, line managers, and managers of line managers can attend, but no one above that level.

## **Enforce the rules about attendees**

To make sure these rules (voluntary, in good faith, no managers above a certain level) are followed, have discussions with anyone in a position to mandate attendance at the workshop about these rules. Write your advertising material to include these rules and to appeal to people who already believe that oppression is a problem, etc. Example: "Do you think diversity in [FIELD] is important? Would you like to be part of changing the culture of [FIELD] to be more

welcoming to members of marginalized groups? You can help by attending the Ally Skills Workshop."

## **Diversity of participants**

The ideal workshop is 20-40% members of marginalized groups, so that each discussion group has at least one and ideally two people from those groups. This is so that each discussion group gets the benefit of their experience and perspective. Having two people in the same marginalized group allows them to support each other and makes it more likely the rest of the group will listen to them.

Getting this distribution requires different techniques in different organizations. In some organizations, members of marginalized groups will sign up for the workshop at the same rate as privileged people, even if it is advertised only to the privileged people. In these organizations, recruiting for the workshop should focus on encouraging privileged people to attend in order to get about 20-40% members of marginalized groups. In other organizations, members of marginalized groups will need to be encouraged to sign up directly. We suggest using a registration system that asks people to answer a free-form question such as "Why are you signing up for the workshop?" which people often answer by describing what marginalized groups they belong to or what privileges they have. Then check the diversity of the registered attendees regularly, and change your advertising strategy based on the proportions registered so far.

## **Schedule and length**

The ideal workshop time is 3 - 3.5 hours, with a 15 minute break about halfway through. We recommend serving drinks and snacks during the break. Allowing a half hour of post-workshop discussion time is often appreciated by participants. It is possible to make the workshop shorter, but the overwhelming majority of feedback from workshop participants was that 2 hours was not long enough. Only a few people have complained that the 3 hour workshop was not long enough.

## **Choose scenarios and customize slides**

Edit the [workshop slides](#) in advance to customize the workshop to be relevant for you and your audience. All of the example scenarios we provide are directly based on events that have actually happened multiple times in multiple communities. Ideally, your scenarios should be too.

The scenarios should start with easier, lower-stakes situations and progress to more difficult situations to let the participants get comfortable with each other and the format. Feel free to create your own scenarios or discuss ones suggested by the participants. We recommend finishing with an easier scenario so that people leave the workshop with a sense of accomplishment, rather than negative feelings from arguing about a more controversial scenario.

Depending on your facilitation style, each scenario takes around 12 - 20 minutes. Most facilitators teach between 4 and 8 scenarios in a 3 hour workshop. We recommend including one more scenario than you expect you will have time for, and just skipping one scenario. More often, discussions will take longer than expected, and you'll need to skip more scenarios. We recommend putting the least important scenarios second and third to last, and teaching the final, somewhat easier scenario as the last scenario if you unexpectedly run out of time.

## **Customizing the workshop for a new culture**

If you are teaching the workshop in a new location or social group, you will need to customize the workshop for that culture. One technique for doing this is to find someone willing to help you who has lived a significant amount both in the culture you are familiar with and in the new culture. Schedule time to review the workshop slides together and make any changes. (This person might make a good co-facilitator.) Do research on how oppression manifests differently in the new culture: read Wikipedia articles, look for scholarly research, read public forums from people in the culture, read news from that culture, and ask several people (especially people in marginalized groups) about particular forms of expression.

When seeking input, keep in mind that many people in any given culture will be convinced that any form of oppression they don't personally experience is mostly or completely gone, whether or not that is true. This is particularly common in cultures which regard themselves as relatively advanced compared to other cultures in a particular area (e.g., Scandinavian countries are more likely to claim that sexism has been solved in their countries, when it is still quite active).

## **Supplies**

Things to bring to the workshop:

- Clicker and video input/output converter
- Stopwatch or timer to time the scenario discussions
- Bell or other noisemaker to signal the end of scenario discussions
- A water bottle or whatever drink you prefer
- Printouts of the [Ally Skills Workshop handout](#) for all participants
- Printouts of the [goal-setting exercise](#)
- Pens (for notes) and felt-tip markers (for name tags)
- Name tags, [with "Pronouns:" printed on them](#) if possible

## **Physical setup**

The seating arrangement for the workshop is ideally round tables that seat 4-6 people with the appropriate number of chairs, arranged so that everyone can hear the presenter speaking and see the slides. If you can't get tables, arranging chairs in circles will do. In most rooms and for most people, you will not need any microphone or sound system, but it's good to have microphones available in case the sound turns out to be too poor. You will definitely need a projector. Rearrange anything that interferes with the workshop. Arrive 30 minutes before the workshop to have time to rearrange the room—it is never set up correctly.

## **Do not record or broadcast the workshop**

We do not recommend recording a workshop or broadcasting it online in any way. Recording will make people afraid to answer or discuss, and participants' comments may be taken out of context. If you do decide to record the workshop, some workarounds are to not record the participants, edit out the participants' answers, only record the instructor and have the instructor repeat any participants input in order to anonymize it, or allow each participant to review and request edits of the video before it is released.

## **Getting feedback**

After the workshop, you may want to survey the participants (see this [example survey](#)) to understand the impact of the workshop as well as to gather any feedback from participants about the workshop style and content that they may be uncomfortable sharing in public.

## **Timeline for preparation**

Here is an example timeline for what to do to prepare for the workshop.

1. At least three weeks before: Schedule date and time of workshop. Make a plan to get information on what to include in the workshop. One method is to schedule a phone meeting to discuss at least one week before the workshop. The client will solicit feedback from employees in whatever way they like. The recommended way is to ask people to email the instructor directly, with a promise to anonymize. An anonymous form will work but can be used to harass the person reading the results.
2. Two weeks before: Have the phone meeting, read the form, or summarize the emails on what content people want to see. Choose or write scenarios and tips to fit the content.
3. One week before: Send the complete slides for review to the client. Ask for ways to customize the content to the company, such as adding the name of the tool they use for chat.
4. Two days before: Print handouts (usually 10% more than expected attendees). Create a survey by copying your survey template. Create a draft email with a survey link. Create draft email with invoice (if applicable).
5. Day of: Send draft emails with survey and invoice to client immediately after the workshop.

## **Teaching the workshop**

### **Before the workshop starts**

Distribute the workshop handouts and pens at the tables. As people enter the room, ask them to fill out a name tag and include their gender pronouns if they don't mind, then choose a table. For public workshops, you will want someone to screen people as they enter and make sure they signed up in advance. If you feel up to it, you can screen people who didn't sign up in advance by asking them what brought them to the workshop and listening to their answers.

## **Fill time while people are arriving late**

Usually people are a few minutes late to the workshop. One way to kill time and get useful information is to ask for volunteers to share why they came to the workshop. This is also good to do simply to get more information to tailor the workshop to the attendees' interests and to get people involved interactively from the start, but it will shorten the time for scenarios.

## **Introduce yourself**

Start by briefly introducing yourself and the name of the workshop, from your title slide. Be sure that your presentation includes attribution or credit to the other authors according to the terms of the CC BY-SA license (a footer or note on the title and closing slide will do nicely). Add yourself to the list of authors.

## **Explain the format and schedule**

Explain the format and schedule of the workshop: how long it will be, when breaks will be, whether each section will be lecture or discussion. Here is an example format for a 3 hour workshop:

- 30 minute introduction
- 45 minute group discussion of scenarios
- 10 minute break
- 80 minute group discussion of scenarios
- 15 minute wrap-up

## **Give more information about yourself**

Now is the time to give more information about yourself, specifically what your sources of expertise are so that people have a reason to listen to you. If you have a particular form of privilege that helps people listen to you in the workshop (a specialized skill, a degree from a respected school, you are male, you are part of the dominant ethnic group, etc.), this is a good time to mention that privilege, acknowledge that it is unfair, and talk about how you are personally using that privilege to end inequality by teaching this workshop.

## **Define privilege, oppression, etc.**

Begin by defining what privilege, oppression, ally, and marginalized person are. Emphasize that a person can be an ally in one situation and marginalized in another, depending on the context. Emphasize that being an ally is about actions, and is not an identity the way that being marginalized is. Give a concrete example of a privilege, oppression, ally, and marginalized person that is not obvious to the majority of the people in the room.

Next, define power and intersectionality, and ask for an example of intersectionality. On the next slide, read the quote from the study showing that people who are from the ethnic majority and men have fewer penalties for diversity-valuing behavior than ethnic minority folks and women. This is to motivate the idea that allies should take action more than marginalized people.

## **Do privilege and power identification exercise**

Help the participants identify when they are most likely to act as an ally by having them identify what power and privilege they possess. This exercise is in the handout after the terminology and resources section. Remind them that this exercise is voluntary and they do not have to do it. Tell them that if other people assume they have a certain privilege, they can decide whether to mark it down or not, and that they do not need to out themselves to do this exercise.

## **Define the scope of the workshop**

Explain that the workshop isn't about getting a "certification," atoning for past mistakes, or protecting yourself from the consequences of future mistakes, but that you will learn how to respond better when you do make mistakes.

We recommend making the topics of legal advice and HR rules may be off-topic for the workshop, even if you are in HR or a lawyer. If you are teaching the workshop at a company, you may be interpreted as representing human resources (HR) even when you are not. If people ask questions about HR policy, or about when to report things to HR, we recommend not commenting. This is particularly difficult when a discussion group comes up with a solution involving reporting the situation to HR, when in many cases that will result in retaliation for the target of the harassment, up to and including losing their job. However, you can't say outright "don't report to HR" when that is in violation of the company's HR rules. This disclaimer lets you avoid giving bad advice to the attendees while not breaking company policy.

Similarly, whether or not you are a lawyer, it is unlikely that you want to offer legal advice in this workshop. The situations described in the scenarios are designed to be not obviously illegal in and of themselves in the United States (though they could be illegal if they were part of a pervasive and severe pattern of harassment).

The workshop is intended only for people who already believe oppression exists and want to act personally to help stop it. Answering questions or discussing whether oppression exists will take too much class time. Provide starting places for people who do have these questions to learn more, like the Geek Feminism Wiki. If someone does start bringing up these questions during the class, remind them of the scope.

## **Explain rules for a safer space**

Workshops should be safe spaces where participants are allowed to make mistakes and possibly do or say foolish or outright oppressive things (by accident only, and they should respond quickly when asked to stop). Accomplishing that takes a lot of preparation and structure, most of which you've already done. This set of instructions just puts the finishing touches on that preparation.

Assure everyone that they can leave and return at any time, no questions asked. Tell everyone that the workshop is intended to be a safer space for learning and is not being recorded (check

that any cameras in the room are actually off—often conferences automatically record all sessions, and many conference rooms have video cameras installed). Assure people that everyone is here voluntarily because they care about fighting oppression, and that the organizers have done some level of screening. Sometimes there is a miscommunication about whether or not the workshop is mandatory; mention that if people aren't here entirely of their own free will, they can take advantage of the first point and leave at any time.

Ask people to anonymize any stories they retell outside the workshop. For public workshops, suggest that they share at the level that they would share at dinner with people they had met that day at a conference.

## **Review basic principles of responding to oppression**

This section covers helpful ground rules for responding to oppression.

- Be short, simple, and firm. Often people fall into the trap of believing their responses must be complex, well-reasoned, and beautifully composed to be effective, and end up doing nothing at all because it is too much work to put together a response. Once you take that pressure off, many people are willing to say things as simple as “We don’t do that here”—which is far better than saying nothing at all.
- Humor usually backfires; avoid it. It is possible to respond to oppression with a joke that isn’t itself sexist, homophobic, racist, classist, etc., but it’s really hard. Most of the time, participants should leave humor for the experts. The exception is when they have time to review their humor or get other people to review it for them, such as on a mailing list.
- Play for the audience. The person doing the oppression is the person least likely to change their mind, so encourage participants to concentrate on changing the minds of the people listening, if any. The exception to this rule is when the person doing the wrong thing is doing so without full awareness of the effect, and/or the person responding has a positive personal relationship with the person doing the thing.
- Practice your responses. Tell them that comedians practice their lines and they are allowed to as well. It’s also okay to choke the first few times they run into a situation; just keep practicing. A useful technique is to pick a few short responses that feel good to them and practice saying them until they come automatically. Some options:
  - “We don’t do that around here.”
  - “Not cool, dude.”
  - “Wow.”
- Pick your battles. Oppression is pervasive enough that no one can respond to every incident they see or they’d never get anything else done. Telling participants that they can choose when to respond to oppression (e.g., not on days when they have a migraine or an important presentation) allows them to act when they are able without feeling like a hypocrite for the times they don’t act.
- Don’t harm one group while trying to support another. Don’t say something sexist, homophobic, transphobic, racist, classist, etc.—for example, responding to a situation involving women booth babes by asking how people would feel about male booth babes

intended to appeal to men. In this example, people are invoking homophobia to attempt to evoke empathy with women feeling sexually objectified, which helps no one. Less obvious is that you should avoid making fun of people by claiming they are less sexually attractive or desirable. It may feel good to make fun of someone by saying he won't get a date because he's sexist, but it will not feel good to someone listening who can't get a date for some reason other than their voluntarily chosen horrible opinions.

## **Tell people what to do if they make a mistake**

Give them instructions on what to do if they make a mistake: apologize, correct themselves, and move on. Share an example of a mistake you made, and how you apologized, corrected yourself, and moved on. This mistake should not be too emotionally charged—think "stubbed your toe" not "broke your leg" kind of mistake. For most audiences, an example involving racism—intentional or not—is too difficult to share here.

**Important:** If you make a mistake while teaching the class, and you notice or someone else points it out, it is really important to apologize, correct yourself, and move on. You can explicitly note that you just demonstrated an important ally skill to the rest of the class. If this is difficult for you, practice before you teach the workshop.

## **Preparing for group discussion**

Now you want the participants to form small groups of 4-6 people, with as much diversity within each group as possible. Forming a group in a training class is almost universally dreaded, so be understanding if this takes some time and you need to help people choose groups. Encourage people by reminding them that everyone is there because they want to fight oppression, so they are probably pretty nice people. If you have set up the room in small tables with seating for 4-6 people at each, you are probably most of the way there. Ask groups of 3 or smaller to join another group. Remind them that they will be encouraged to change groups at the breaks. Encourage them to sit with people they don't normally talk to. People often sit with people they already feel comfortable with, which is usually people like them, and people whose stories they already know. This gives them permission to leave a group of friends and sit with new, different people, which means they learn more.

Once the groups are formed, ask each group group to introduce themselves to each other with ONE SENTENCE which is just their name, their affiliation or job, and their pronouns—emphasize this because otherwise people tend to go on for several minutes about themselves, and you only want to spend 3 minutes on this section. Demonstrate by introducing yourself in the same way.

We recommend listing the three forms of the gendered pronouns instead of just one because for less common pronouns, people won't be able to figure out what all three versions are if they only read one (see this [list for examples](#)). (While there are five forms of gendered pronouns, two of them can usually be inferred from the first three.)

We used to recommend requiring people to share their gender pronouns as most of the people who didn't want to do that were cis people who were thought that everyone should guess pronouns based on presentation. Now most of the people who don't want to share their pronouns are people questioning their gender identity who genuinely aren't sure of the gender and actively want other people to assume their gender.

Ask group members to notify the instructor if the people in their group all have the same pronouns. If this happens, ask for volunteers from groups with more than one or two people of that gender to switch with people from the same gender group. DO NOT guess at a person's gender and ask them specifically to switch. If there aren't enough people of each gender to do this, or there are but no one wants to switch groups, it is okay—you are just trying to avoid a situation where, e.g., 4 women sit in the same group and 3 groups have no women at all. It's difficult to adapt this technique for other dimensions of diversity—asking people to identify as specific races, sexual orientation, or religion is more difficult than asking them to identify as specific genders, which is usually something people have to do every day because English and many other languages are gendered.

Ask them to choose a moderator, someone whose job is to interrupt people who are speaking too much and invite people who are not speaking as much, and a report-out person, whose job is taking notes and summarizing what the group discussed for the rest of the room.

After a few minutes, start walking around the groups asking if the moderator has been chosen. Make sure one person identifies themselves as the moderator; some especially shy groups may say they have a moderator without actually choosing one. An easy way to do this is by raising your hand when you ask the question, which naturally makes the moderator raise their hand.

### **Give final discussion tips**

Next, assure them that there are no trick questions. If you do have any scenarios that might lead people in the wrong direction, either rewrite them or give a hint before the scenario starts. Ask them to make up any details they feel are important that aren't included in the scenario description. Tell them the focus of the discussion should be on what privileged people can do in that situation to help (and specifically not what the marginalized person can do). This will come in handy in case anyone demands you talk about what marginalized people can do. (A good answer is always, "Marginalized people should look for an ally and ask them to do the work, and if they can't find one, do whatever necessary to take care of themselves.") Tell them that the "you" in the scenario is a theoretical person who could act as an ally, not literally "you" the person reading the scenario.

### **Lead scenario discussions**

Now you are ready to discuss scenarios: examples of situations in which privileged people take action to support people who are targets of oppression. Plan for about 15 - 20 minutes total time for each scenario, depending on your facilitation style.

For each scenario, read the scenario aloud and ask if anyone has any questions about the scenario. Then tell the groups how many minutes they have (somewhere between 4 and 8 minutes; 5 minutes is most common) to discuss what ally actions would look like. Try to listen unobtrusively to the discussion in the groups to check if there are any bad dynamics or situations that you need to intervene in, most commonly one person dominating the discussion. Watch their facial expressions and body language as well. Don't hover or act like you're looking for cheating—you don't want people to feel surveilled. Once you feel confident the groups are working well together, you can lighten up on the observation and play with your phone during the breaks.

You will have to stop the discussion while people are still talking excitedly in almost every case. Give people 30 seconds warning before the discussion ends by saying, "30 seconds!" loudly. A bell is useful to signal the end of the discussion without shouting yourself hoarse. It will get harder to stop discussion as the workshop goes on. Another technique effective in any size of room is to say, "Clap once if you can hear me," "Clap twice if you can hear me," until everyone is quiet again.

Once everyone has quieted down, ask each group to report out, listing their major discussion points, suggestions, insights, and questions. To avoid repetition, encourage them not to repeat what other groups have said and instead say "We talked about what the other groups talked about," and add anything new. Praise the first group to do this. Start with a different group each time so that every group gets a chance to list the most common insights first.

At the end of each report-out, briefly recap any points you'd like to emphasize, point out any problems in their suggestions (like places where they are being unintentionally harmful to another marginalized group), and answer any questions they have. However, try to resist making any points that weren't directly suggested or requested until all the groups have reported out, so participants get the reward of coming up with answers on their own.

Give a lot of positive feedback while people are reporting out good ideas, like head-nodding, smiling, and supportive interjections like "Good!" or "I was hoping someone would get to that!" **The most common way facilitators can improve is by giving more positive feedback during report-outs.** Most facilitators listen silently with a blank expression and without moving their bodies, or only respond when there is something to correct.

After the group report-out is finished, present any tips relevant to the previous scenario, draw people's attention to how they are conducting discussion, etc. Alternating between group discussion, group report-out, and very short lectures or stories is a good way to keep people engaged. Don't forget to take breaks; usually participants don't notice the time flying by and may not remind you to take a break if you forget.

## Wrap-up

The wrap-up introduces some more advanced ally skills which participants can use to continue learning how to support members of marginalized groups in their communities. First, pass out the goal-setting exercise handout (located on the [Ally Skills Workshop website](#)) and give people 5 minutes to fill it in. Emphasize that this is a voluntary exercise and they don't need to do it. The exercise paper is theirs to keep; do not collect it or read it.

After the time is up (or however long it takes for the majority of the room to stop writing), tell them they can finish it up later if they aren't done and start explaining the wrap-up slide.

- **Speak less, listen more - except when speaking is risky:** People often wonder when they should speak up and when they should listen. The short version is that if speaking up will bring rewards, an ally should probably try to "pass the microphone" or "amplify marginalized voices" to redirect that benefit to the people who most deserve it. If speaking up will bring negative attention, an ally should probably speak up themselves. Sometimes saying the same thing will bring negative attention to a marginalized person and positive attention to an ally, in which case it is better to speak up as an ally and point out how unfair this is.
- **Treat ally actions as bare minimum expectation:** Sometimes people will praise someone acting as ally. Responding with "What, everyone with my privilege should be doing this" has two positive effects: it takes the focus off the privileged person and puts it back on the marginalized group, and it encourages other potential allies to take action.
- **Follow and support leaders from marginalized groups:** People from the marginalized group usually know what they need best. Instead of starting your own thing as an outsider, find existing leaders within the group and support them.
- **Understand your discomfort before reacting:** Sometimes people will give you feedback that makes you feel uncomfortable or angry. Figure out why you feel that way before responding: did someone point out that you made a mistake and you feel guilty about it, or are you mad because someone was being a total jerk?
- **Avoid "sensitivity gotcha" and encourage growth mindset:** Sometimes people criticize DEI-related actions as a way to score points or feel superior under the guise of improving DEI. This harms DEI by discouraging people from learning or taking action. Allies should promote a culture of growth mindset, where people can learn with a minimum of humiliation or dominance.
- **Made a mistake? Acknowledge, apologize, and move on:** If you wait until you are perfect to act as an ally, you will never start. Get good at apologizing and moving on and mistakes will be less frightening. You can also start with small actions and learn with lower stakes.

Thank the participants for attending and making the workshop great, and then ask them to give themselves a round of applause because the majority of the workshop is them talking to each other. If possible, stick around to answer questions for at least 15 minutes.

## Running online workshops

We have tested two ways of running an online workshop: one where everyone joins the video conference using their own laptop (best for organizations where most employees work remotely), and one where the attendees are physically present in one or two rooms with a good video conferencing setup, and the instructor joins by video. It doesn't work to have the instructor and some attendees in the same room, with some attendees joining remotely, because the remote attendees are at a significant disadvantage in the discussion part of the workshop.

### Dialing in separately

Before the workshop:

- Use the Zoom.us video conferencing or some other conferencing system that has breakout rooms (at the time of this writing, this is the only video conferencing solution we know of with breakout rooms). The meeting host will need a paid license for Zoom.us. Everyone else can attend without buying a paid Zoom license.
- Find someone willing to serve as co-host (see "[Preventing online harassment](#)" for their duties).
- Scenario discussions tend to take longer due to longer inter-person speaking break times over video.
- Put your slides in a format where you can present them by sharing a single window instead of your whole desktop (e.g., PDF in a PDF viewer set to "one page at a time" mode, or in-window presentation on Google Slides).

During the workshop:

- Copy the text of the introduction slide into chat every few minutes while people arrive. Note that people joining the meeting will be unable to see anything placed in chat before the meeting starts so you will have to paste it in several times.
- The introduction slide should include:
  - Links to the handout and exercises
  - A request for people to change their Zoom display names to the name and gender pronouns they want other people to use, e.g. "Valerie (she/her/hers)." Tell them how: click on "Participants" and mouse over their name, click the "Rename" button that appears.
  - Encouragement to turn off video, use virtual backgrounds, and show pets.
- Turning off video for others may help people with low bandwidth connections.
- Make some kind of chit-chat while people are arriving. Talking about the weather, asking people to show their pets, admiring people's virtual backgrounds, and asking people what they are hoping to get out of the workshop are all good options.
- Give people 3 minute breaks every half hour and 10 minutes every hour. This drastically reduces video call fatigue.

- Request that people send you a private chat saying if they don't want to be in a group with someone (or in a group at all), and normalize it. E.g. "There are lots of reasons why you wouldn't want to be in a group with someone else that are not because you don't like them. For example, I recommend not being in the same group as someone in your reporting chain."

During scenario discussions:

- Online, people are more likely to be too quiet in the discussions than to talk too much. Emphasize the part of the moderator's job that is about inviting people to speak.
- Remind the note-taker to write down their breakout room number so you can use it to call on groups during the report-out.
- There is a delay after you click "close" on the breakout rooms (currently 1 minute). Tell people to remain in the breakout rooms after the closing notification and keep talking until the breakout room closes
- Paste the scenario into the chat before sending people to their breakout rooms (they can't see it if you do it after they join breakout rooms).
- Use the random breakout room creation feature, then adjust for gender pronouns and requests to not be in the same group as someone or in any group at all. Use a notepad to write down the constraints.
- Assign people to new breakout rooms every scenario. Since people don't get to choose the people in the breakout rooms, when people find a specific person annoying they know they are unlikely to be in the same group with them again.

## **Written report-out option**

We have recently started using written report-outs for online classes. It makes the report-outs shorter so you can cover more scenarios, it reduces the need to interrupt or correct people who are speaking, and participants seem to like it better.

## **All attendees in a room together**

For online workshops where attendees are in a room together, send your online co-facilitator the [online co-facilitator handout](#), which explains how to do the parts of workshop facilitation you can't do while teaching by video, including printing the handouts, arranging the tables, and helping form groups.

## **Audio and video tips**

Always use headphones of some sort. If you use wireless headphones, we recommend taking them off whenever you leave the computer so that you don't accidentally broadcast your break time activities.

[Three point lighting](#) helps attendees see your face and expressions better. The goal is to have multiple sources of light which illuminate your face without shadows that obscure or distract.

Your camera should be roughly at eye-level and on a stable, non-moving surface (do not use a laptop computer sitting on your lap). Your background does not need to be blank, but it should be non-distracting and calming (watch videos from leading YouTube personalities and see what kind of backgrounds they use to keep the eye interested but not distracted). Virtual backgrounds are fine.

Participants have a harder time seeing the facilitator's facial expressions and gestures online, so it helps to practice emoting more and using bigger gestures. You can also use brighter colors, higher contrast, or other visual emphasis in your clothes, makeup, hair, or other parts of your self-presentation to make it easier to see you and your expressions.

## **Preventing online harassment**

Video conferencing platforms have mostly fixed drive-by online harassment of video calls, but it helps to plan for what happens if someone starts harassing anyone in your meeting. Learn how to use the tools to mute, eject, or stop screen-sharing from other people. You may need to change some settings before you start the meeting. It helps to have at least two people with the ability to manage participants.

## **Handling difficult situations**

Difficult situations are rare in the workshop, but when they arise the facilitator needs to handle them skillfully and firmly. Few things are more demoralizing than going to an ally skills training and having it ruined by someone behaving badly. **The only person who can take meaningful action is the facilitator; it's your job and no one else's to fix the problem.** If it is difficult for you to take action, remind yourself that the rest of the workshop is suffering and feel empathy for them; once you do that, it is often much easier to take whatever action is necessary.

## **Someone arrives late**

Part of what makes the workshop productive is that everyone is starting from the same point of understanding basic concepts and following the discussion guidelines. Without the introduction, people have unproductive and even harmful discussions. When someone walks into the workshop late, suddenly you have a break in trust and a person who doesn't know the same basic concepts and guidelines.

When this happens, you can ask them to leave at the next opportunity (usually when people are forming groups or starting the next discussion). Just repeat over and over that the introduction is mandatory, you are really sorry, but you have to be fair to the others, and maybe they can join the next workshop (whether or not one is scheduled). If you are feeling extremely generous, you may offer to bring them up to speed during the next discussion, by sitting down with them and reviewing the handout and telling them about the moderator. If you have two people co-facilitating, one can bring the late person up to speed while the other is running the workshop.

## **You need to ask someone to leave**

The solution for many difficult situations is to ask a participant to leave, which is difficult for many people to do. Here are some tips on how to do it.

If you need to ask someone to leave immediately, call a break and tell everyone to return in 5 minutes. Ask the person to come speak with you somewhere that you can't be overheard, usually outside the classroom. Depending on the situation, you might say:

- "I don't think this workshop is a good format for you."
- "I'm afraid I have a rule that executives can't join the workshop."
- "For some reason, this workshop isn't working for you. I don't have time to explain right now but I'd be happy to talk after the workshop."

Then tell them you are asking them to leave. They will probably argue; keep repeating the same thing and expressing how sorry you are, but that's the rules and they have to leave. Another helpful technique is to offer for them to attend a workshop in the future, or to teach a special workshop which they could attend (for example, saying you'd be happy to teach a workshop for executive leadership). They will rarely follow up to actually organize a follow-up workshop. (If you don't want to do the workshop, quote them a price that they are unwilling to pay. Don't offer to do a free workshop.)

## **Executives are attending**

If the top-level executives are in the workshop, there's about a 50% chance that they will have some kind of negative effect, such as talking over other people, presenting their own non-evidence based intuitions as fact, or implicitly silencing other employees due to their poor reaction to hearing things they dislike in the past. This is one reason we recommend having a limit of three levels of hierarchy in the workshop.

Often the facilitator is afraid to correct the executive or make them leave out of fear of retaliation. If the facilitator works for that executive, then doing so can be a serious threat to their career. That's why we recommend that employees teaching the workshop in their company do not teach workshops that include people in their reporting chain or people who could harm their careers even if they don't work directly for them.

If you are an outside facilitator and an executive chooses to confront you in the workshop, you may be unwilling to stand your ground because you are worried that you may not get paid. We are happy to report that that has not been our experience in the few situations in which this has happened, even when we offered a refund.

## **Someone talks for too long**

Sometimes someone will ask a "question" that is really a long digression, or go into too much detail during the report-out. Once one person starts doing this, it often snowballs as other

people start copying their behavior, so it's important to stop early. See the section "[Practice interrupting](#)" for useful phrases.

## **Someone says something harmful**

Every workshop will have multiple incidents of people saying something harmful, everything from saying "you guys" to using a well-known racial slur. We recommend letting the small stuff slide—if someone says "females" for women, for example—but jumping in immediately for big things, like racial slurs. For things in between, you might wait till the person has finished speaking, address their main point, and then note afterwards that the thing they said is problematic for X reason while noting that you are sure they did not intend to be harmful.

One general technique for gently correcting a well-intentioned person in a way that keeps encouraging other people to talk is to praise their positive intentions, and then explain how the intention goes awry. For example:

- "I hear that you are coming from a place of wanting to protect this person, and I know exactly how you feel. But the problem is by jumping in this way without asking what they want, you end up treating them more like a child than an adult, which is unfair and demeaning."
- "It sounds like you really care about fairness, and I agree, fairness is important. What isn't so obvious is that the situation is already unfair—in the opposite direction."
- "I also would really like simple, 100% clear answers that always work in every situation. But we are here because we are willing to do the hard work, and sometimes that means dealing with ambiguity."

Sometimes another participant will correct the person; usually this goes well, but if the person who was corrected gets defensive, remind them of the ally skill of apologizing, correcting themselves, and moving on. You can interrupt long-running defensive comments by loudly saying, "Thank you for demonstrating the ally skill of moving on" repeatedly until they do, actually, move on.

Rarely someone in the workshop may overcorrect other people for tiny errors in a way that diminishes psychological safety. Respond with a request to give people grace and the opportunity to practice their new skills before correcting them in public.

## **Someone publicly confronts the facilitator**

Very occasionally, a participant will publicly disagree with the facilitator in an insistent way. We're not talking about someone offering information the facilitator doesn't have, but someone who demands that the facilitator change their recommendation and agree with them publicly.

If the discussion is about HR or a legal point, whether oppression exists, or what marginalized people can do, the facilitator can refer to the introduction where they said they would not talk

about those things. If the discussion is in the scope of the workshop, here are some useful phrases:

- "I don't think that's true, but I'll go double-check after the workshop."
- "I'm just telling you what marginalized people are saying."
- "That's what the research says."
- "I'm here to share what I know, and that doesn't match what I have learned."
- "I could be wrong, but I don't think I am. Let's follow up after the workshop."

You can also announce a break and then either go spend time by yourself, or speak to the person privately.

### **Someone attends the workshop in bad faith**

Very occasionally, someone will attend the workshop with the purpose of disrupting it or criticizing the facilitator. We recommend screening participants in some way to prevent this—often people who work for a company have been screened sufficiently by the hiring process, but not always.

Someone attending in bad faith may ask borderline insulting or foolish questions under the guise of "just wondering" or "just asking questions," either in the whole class or in their group. You may identify that this is going on by the expressions on the faces or the body language of people in their group: blank faces, disgusted faces, crossed arms, pushing their chairs away from the bad faith person. Occasionally another participant will come tell you about problems during a break. Sometimes the problem person will come talk to you directly.

In most cases, you should just ask them to leave. If you aren't sure that they are acting in bad faith, you can try saying these things, either in front of everyone or by pulling them aside during a discussion or break:

- "I'm not sure why you're asking that question."
- "Your question seems really hostile."
- "You seem to be acting in bad faith. Why is that?"
- "Are you here voluntarily? Because you don't seem to be getting much out of it."
- "What brings you to this workshop?"

Often just repeating yourself over and over is the best way to handle this; eventually they'll get frustrated and leave. Definitely don't engage in debate or try to convince them; that's exactly what they want and they will waste your time and that of the rest of the workshop.

### **Workshop went really badly**

If a workshop went really badly for one reason or another, you can often repair your working relationship by directly owning up to any mistakes you made, talking about what you will do differently in the future, and offering either a discount or a full refund (but not another

workshop—it's likely that will be a bad experience too and you don't want to lock yourself into another workshop). In our experience, even in the worst workshop most participants walk away with positive feelings and useful knowledge, even if there was a public confrontation or embarrassing misstep during the workshop.

## **Best practices for an ongoing ally skills program**

This section summarizes the best practices for a team of facilitators to support each other and an ongoing ally skills program. These tips are intended for a team of 10 or more people working together in the same organization and teaching the workshop several times over a year or more.

### **Simplify the workshop**

The workshop is designed to be facilitated by a full-time expert. The content is generic enough to be adapted to many different audiences. You can make facilitation easier in a number of ways:

- Record/write a standard introduction
- Tell participants that the facilitator is very likely to say "I don't know"
- Make extensive notes to guide scenario report-outs
- Write detailed scripts for facilitators
- Increase the detail of the slides
- Create slides with detailed answers
- Create a slide with possible answers and ask groups to pick from them
- Shorten the workshop
- Choose easier scenarios
- Include a trained group leader in each discussion group
- Create short videos covering topics in the report-out

### **Teach practice workshops and scenario report-outs**

Teach a practice workshop to the other facilitators and anyone else who seems like they could provide valuable feedback or practice. Full practice workshops are useful for refining the content for your audience as well as practicing both the introduction and the scenario report-outs.

Concentrated scenario report-out facilitation practice is particularly useful. We recommend practicing difficult situations in role-play as long as all participants know in advance that some people are pretending to have positions that they don't actually hold. Otherwise it is very confusing to have someone who is a known expert in anti-oppression make a statement that is ill-informed or hostile. The context "this person is an expert" is very different than "this person is pretending to be a beginner" or "this person is pretending to be hostile."

### **Support continuing education for facilitators**

Facilitators should be supported in developing both their knowledge of ally skills and their facilitation skills. This may look like a monthly one-day retreat together, a weekly lunch meeting, formal training, individual coaching, speaker training, attending conferences, or buying books.

## **Add as many facilitators as is helpful**

Include as many co-facilitators as makes sense for your organization. Sometimes you can add a co-facilitator who is a cultural or subject matter expert but not necessarily trained as a general facilitator. You can also have additional facilitators sitting quietly on the side or participating in group discussions who can assist. They should be identified in advance so that participants don't perceive them as inappropriately usurping the facilitators' role.

## **Shadow a workshop before facilitating**

Facilitators can join workshops that other facilitators are leading before leading their own workshop. This is helpful both for new facilitators as well as experienced facilitators who want a refresh for their next workshop.

## **Have post-workshop report-outs and discussion**

After each workshop, send a report-out of any notable incidents to the rest of the facilitators. Ideally, the facilitators will meet in person shortly after each workshop to discuss any incidents, share what they've learned, and discuss any ideas for improvement or changes.

## **Collect and review survey results**

Anonymous surveys of participants are crucial, both to improve the workshop content and facilitator skill, but also to build support for the program within the organization. If you are training people who stay in your organization (e.g., employees), you can do a series of surveys to track the effects of the workshop in the long-term.

## **Create community among facilitators**

Facilitators should have frequent contact with each other. Chat channels, mailing lists, regular meetings, group lunches, monthly presentations or discussions, off-sites, and other community-building activities will help facilitators support each other and feel supported.

## **Integrate ally actions into organizational goals**

The most successful ally skills programs are when ally actions are connected to compensation and promotions. Note: attending the workshop should never be incentivized in and of itself. If people attend the workshop for any other reason than because they genuinely want to use their power and privilege to support marginalized groups, the format of the workshop will not work. Do not make attending the workshop count towards anyone's quarterly goals, fulfill a requirement, or appear to be a means to another end.

## **Reward facilitators**

Facilitating the workshop is extremely difficult and exhausting work. Facilitators should have their work count towards promotions and compensation increases. Both preparation and recovery time should count as normal working hours.

## **Bring in external experts**

An external facilitator who is more experienced can co-facilitate or shadow facilitators, especially when the organization doesn't yet have its own experienced facilitators. The facilitator can also review materials, provide facilitator feedback, and practice specific facilitation skills.

## **Example scenarios, tips, and discussion guides**

You can use these scenarios and tips unchanged, modify them, or write your own. For most facilitators, we recommend writing down a list of points you want to be sure to cover and marking them off with a pen as each group reports out, so you have a list of what you want to cover when all the groups are done. It's also good to think through potential harmful suggestions and how you would explain what's wrong with them in an empathetic but firm way. We suggest reusing scenarios; each time you teach a scenario you will get more skilled at it and come up with better ideas.

### **Scenario: A woman is standing near your group at an event**

A woman you don't know is standing near your group at a conference or similar event in a male-dominated field. She is alone and looks like she would rather be talking to people.

*Suggested discussion time: 5 minutes*

Ideal response:

- Walk up and stand a little farther away from what you think is the usual distance, raise your hand in a friendly manner, and say, "Hello, my name is \$NAME. How are you enjoying the event?" If she offers to shake hands or some other standard greeting that you feel comfortable with, reciprocate. Don't ask her name if she doesn't offer it. If she responds in a positive way, make a little bit of small talk but quickly move on to ask her, "My friends and I were discussing \$TOPIC over there, would you care to join us?" If she chooses to go with you, make introductions.

Bad responses:

- "What do you do?" or "Where do you work?" Women are often challenged on their credentials at conferences or events, and this can be mistaken for questioning her right to be there or trying to suss out her relative status.
- Asking for her name, location, marital or family status.
- Telling her personal information like your own marital status, location, etc.
- Continuing a two-person conversation for more than a few minutes before offering to introduce her to the group.
- Making an explicit or implicit request to touch her, by offering to shake hands or kiss on the cheek or other greeting involving physical touch.

Points to cover:

- You MUST talk about the underlying tension in this scenario: we assume men are heterosexual and likely to be making a sexual advance if they speak to a strange woman. It is great if someone mentions that they don't want to appear to be hitting on the woman, in that case, thank them and explain the problem. If no one mentions it in their report-out, ask a question about what makes people nervous about approaching a woman in this scenario. Explain that the ways to counter this are to stand a little farther away than usual, don't ask her name, ask a very neutral impersonal question, and quickly invite her to join a larger group rather than continue talking one-on-one.
- People will suggest asking a woman to do this. It's okay to ask a woman to do this, but it is important that men are willing to take on this responsibility when there isn't a woman to do it. If they are physically intimidating for some reason (great height, unusual personal style, etc.), it is reasonable for someone else to do this.
- Don't tell her about your partner or children or sexual orientation. This is often seen by well-meaning allies as a signal that they aren't hitting on a woman; unfortunately plenty of people cheat on their partners and begin sexual advances by oversharing personal information about their partners and children.
- Many people prefer not to touch strangers for a variety of reasons: health, personal preference, religious beliefs, etc. A wave of the hand can easily segue into shaking hands or cheek kissing or whatever the local cultural greeting involving touching is—if she offers. Don't insist on physical contact or make it awkward for her to refuse it.

**Tip: Pay attention to patterns of discussion related to gender, race, age, etc.**

The next slide asks people to be aware of whether people are having difficulty being heard or dominating the conversation, and whether there are patterns related to gender, race, age, or other factors. It is important to raise this awareness early for two reasons: First, some people may already be frustrated by being interrupted or talked over in the first 3 minutes of a workshop designed to stop oppression. Second, you want to stop this behavior very early in the workshop or else participants won't get the full benefit.

**Scenario: Person who is hard of hearing is ignored in a meeting**

At a meeting, a person who is hard of hearing makes a suggestion, but no one picks up on it. Later on in the meeting, a hearing person makes the same suggestion and is given credit for it.

**Presentation tip:** Ask for a show of hands of everyone who has seen something like this, but not exactly like this, happen in a meeting.

*Suggested discussion time: 5 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- "I'm glad you picked up on [person's name]'s idea! [Person's name], could you expand on that?"

- "[NAME] suggested that earlier and we didn't pursue it. Let's go back to that. [NAME], would you like to expand on that idea?"
- Systemic response: Make a habit of saying, "That seems like a good idea," or "I'd like to hear more about your idea" when members of marginalized groups are speaking.
- Systemic response: Start an organization-wide initiative to encourage formally using [meeting roles](#) like moderators and note-takers. Gatekeepers make sure people get to speak who might otherwise not, and note-takers document who said what first.
- If the hard of hearing person is having difficulty participating, change the meeting to make it as easy for them to contribute as a hearing person. This might mean more meetings by chat, hiring more interpreters, using a system to prevent interruptions, using more hand signals, or taking live notes.
- For anything more confrontational, first ask for the marginalized person's consent. Then agree on whether you might say something more confrontational, speak to the person's manager after the meeting, or something else.

Bad:

- Assume that it must have happened because the person wasn't speaking loudly or clearly enough due to being hard of hearing. There are many reasons people might speak more quietly; most of them have to do with systemic oppression (see below).
- Suggest that the two people work together on the idea. Often the reason someone repeats someone else's idea is because they have so little respect for that person that they don't bother to listen to them. Or they may be deliberately stealing that person's idea. Either way, don't encourage them to work together.
- Start a confrontation without the marginalized person's consent. The person who will face retaliation is more likely to be the marginalized person, and they should choose whether they want this to happen.

Points to cover:

- It is crucial to explicitly call out the concept of consent of the marginalized person when attempting to help in ways that could result in retaliation on the marginalized person. The ideal responses are unlikely to generate blowback, but anything else needs consent. When to ask for consent is tricky; there is a point where someone's behavior becomes a public problem and it is no longer up to the marginalized person to decide whether other people can take action. But avoid causing harm to the marginalized person without consent if you possibly can, and this is a case in which you can.
- The first step is noticing when this happens. Encourage people to try paying more attention to who speaks and gets credit in meetings (this will require speaking less for some people for a while).
- Note that if you are the subject this is happening to, you have few options. This is why an ally needs to do this.

- Note that this can happen to any person known to be a member of an underrepresented marginalized group.
- If anyone suggests this is happening because the hard of hearing person isn't speaking loudly or clearly enough, explain that this is a form of explanation used for not hearing many different marginalized groups: women speak too softly or have voices that are too high, people from different ethnic group or class use "the wrong" speech patterns, people speaking a second language have an accent, etc. Either the meeting is not set up to accommodate people fairly (e.g., a microphone doesn't pick up higher-pitched voices as well), marginalized people have been trained not to stick out (speaking softly), or people with privilege are unwilling to be flexible in how information is presented to them (tuning out anyone who has a different accent or dialect).

### **Tip: Effective and just meetings**

Good meetings have the following roles:

- Facilitator
- Timekeeper
- Notetaker
- Gatekeeper

Read more about what each role involves at: <https://frameshiftconsulting.com/meeting-skills/>

### **Scenario: People ignore younger coworkers**

In meetings, you notice that both clients and your coworkers tend to speak more to older and/or more tenured coworkers, even when responding to a question or comment from a younger and/or newer coworker.

*Suggested discussion time: 5 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- "I'm not sure. [NAME], what do you think?"
- "You know who the expert on that is, [NAME]! [NAME], can you answer that?"
- "[NAME] could probably give you a better answer than I can. [NAME], is this something you know?"
- "I'd like to hear from [NAME] because they always bring a new perspective. [NAME], any thoughts?"
- "I think everyone has heard enough from me in this meeting! Let's get some input from other folks. [NAMES], do you have anything to add?"
- If you have a good relationship with the person ignoring your coworkers, take them aside after the meeting and say, "Hey, I noticed that you sometimes address your comments to me when I'm not the person who is most relevant. It makes it harder for other people to get experience and credit for their work. What can we do differently?"

- If you have a good relationship with the person being ignored, let them know you notice and are taking action, and offer to plan in advance what to do when this happens again.
- The responses to the "[person is ignored in a meeting](#)" scenario are also relevant.

Bad:

- Take on the position of "designated speaker" for your younger and/or newer coworkers by repeating what they say without credit.
- Confront the people doing the ignoring in a way that might cause backlash to the people being ignored.
- Tell the ignored person to speak up or be more assertive.

Points to cover:

- Expertise can come from people of any age or tenure. The perspective of people who are new to something or have different backgrounds from the majority are particularly valuable in situations where people with tenure have become inured to problems by repeated exposure.
- It's easy to fall into the trap of being patronizing when people are less experienced or literally younger than you. Think carefully about whether you are helping someone grow their expertise or preventing them from growing under the guise of protecting them. When in doubt, give someone the information and agency they need to make the decision for themselves.

### **Scenario: Coworker makes a sizeist comment about someone else's food**

You are eating lunch in the employee kitchen when a group sits down near you. One person comments loudly "If I ate that, I'd be as big as a house!" A higher-weight coworker is sitting nearby and can clearly overhear.

**Presentation tip:** Before discussion starts, ask whether there would still be a problem if the higher-weight coworker wasn't present. (The answer is "yes.")

*Suggested discussion time: 8 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- Say quietly, "Hey, I'm trying to cut down on diet and fat talk because I'm trying to be more positive about my body. Would you mind not saying that sort of thing at work?"
- Say, "What other people eat is their own business," smile, and change the subject.
- Change the subject and then tell the manager of the person who made the comment that they are embarrassing and harming their coworkers.

- If you have a close relationship with the person who made the comment, change the subject and then have a private conversation with that person about why fat/diet talk is harmful and why you want to avoid it at work.
- Work to institute a no diet talk/no fat talk policy at work.
- In addition to one of the previous actions, if you have reason to believe that they would welcome it, tell the higher weight coworker privately that you object to diet/fat talk and are taking action to prevent it in the future.

#### Bad responses:

- Do nothing.
- Enter into a discussion about whether the food is healthy or not.
- Tell the higher weight coworker that they are beautiful/good looking/healthy.
- Enter into a discussion right there about the myths around food, weight, and health. (This is a fine thing to do, just not in the moment when a rude comment is fresh in everyone's mind. Also, it is likely that the person will ask the higher weight coworker to support their sizeist comments.)
- Tell the higher weight coworker that you felt bad about the comment and wait for them to respond. (It's okay to do this if you make it clear you aren't looking for praise or emotional support, and you also take concrete action and make the coworker aware of it, but consider whether the coworker wants to be reminded of the event or would welcome your communication.)

#### Points to cover:

- People often ask if fat/diet talk is okay if no higher weight person is present. The answer is no: fat/diet talk reinforces the system oppression based on body size no matter who is present. Also, you can't tell if someone has body image or eating disorders by looking at them, since they affect people of all sizes. The higher weight coworker is added to this scenario just to make it easier for people to understand the consequences of behavior most of them consider normal.
- It is still harmful when people use fat/diet talk when referring to their own bodies. While the immediate target of the criticism is the self, self-directed fat/diet talk creates and supports a norm of an ideal body type and invites others to compare their bodies with the speaker's. ("If you're too fat, and I weigh more than you, what does that say about me?")
- Fatphobia has a gendered component: women are judged more harshly for being higher weight. Fat/diet talk is also often used as a [means of bonding between women](#), where they send the message, "I am one of you," by taking turns criticizing their own bodies. Often, men feel uncomfortable speaking up when women are engaging in fat/diet talk, perhaps because they view acknowledging the talk as feminine (if they fear femininity), but also because they are worried about using male privilege to scold women. This problem comes up for other forms of power: ethnic majority, someone's manager, etc. The solution is for people in a position of power to be kind, diffident, and vulnerable

about how they respond, e.g. add "I'm so sorry to interrupt, but it just seems to me that fat/diet talk can be uncomfortable to some people," or "Hey, when I hear people talking like that, it makes me feel anxious and unhappy about my appearance. I wonder if we could not do that at work?"

- Many workplaces have forums, clubs, or friend groups particularly interested in athletic activity (e.g., a Slack channel for people who bicycle a lot). Ask them to keep this discussion to the people who actively want to participate in it, and to avoid negative body talk in those areas (e.g., no "I missed my morning spin class, my butt is going to spill out of my jeans!" and instead "I missed my morning spin class, this is messing with my self-care routine."). In general, if coworkers are friends and want to engage in negative body talk, they should do it where only people who want to participate in it can hear.
- Health and body size are much less related than many people assume, and body size and food/food type are also much less related. While some higher weight people are unhealthy, people of any weight can be either healthy or unhealthy. Don't get into an argument about the details around this.
- It is an enormous invasion of autonomy and privacy to tell another adult human what foods they should or should not be eating, implicitly or explicitly. This can only be excused by fatphobia and the idea that higher weight people lack self-control or intelligence.
- Often people will share stories about shaming people for being "too thin" or people commenting on lower weight people eating "bad" food. This is fine and helpful, but if anyone says something along the lines of "skinny-shaming is just as bad as fat-shaming," jump in and remind them that fatphobia is far more harmful. Remind people not to try to avoid the discomfort of talking about fatphobia by diminishing it by saying it is equally bad as a lesser form of oppression.

### **Tip: Weight discrimination at work**

Discrimination against higher weight people in the workplace is real and affects women more than men. We associate higher weight people with lack of virtue, lack of self-control, lack of health, and other negative qualities which make higher weight people less likely to be hired or promoted. Workplace fitness/health (e.g., walk 10,000 steps a day challenges) initiatives often discriminate against higher weight people, as well as people with body image disorders and disabled people. Think through any workplace fitness/health initiative carefully to be sure they aren't discriminating against higher weight people, disabled people, pregnant people, caregivers, or any other marginalized groups.

### **Scenario: Mailing list post uses a woman as an example of an ignorant person**

On a company mailing list, someone writes "How would you explain this [technical thing] to your grandmother?"

*Suggested discussion time: 5 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- Publicly reply with "Did you mean, how would I explain this to a technically unsavvy person? Then I would [answer their question]." (This avoids a flame war.)
- If the list has a code of conduct and way to report violations, do that.
- Systemic response: Publicly reply with "I am tired of people using women as examples of technically unsavvy people. Plenty of women are experts in this area [name some if you want]. I want a code of conduct for this list."
- If you have a close relationship with the person and you know they are interested in promoting diversity, try replying privately first with something like: "Hey, I know you had no intention of doing this, but when you used grandmother as an example, you were reinforcing the idea that women and older people aren't interested or welcome in this area." In the ideal case, they will reply to themselves publicly to correct their first email. If they don't, it is still up to you to reply publicly so the people listening know what is acceptable behavior.

Bad:

- Suggesting replacement with a person of a particular profession (classism) or some other group stereotyped as less technical.
- Very young people are a technically a valid example, but it's best to get out of the habit of invoking lazy stereotypes altogether and go with saying what you mean—"technically unsavvy person."
- Just replying with examples of women or older people who are experts in this area. That is a popular response but needs to be combined with the above techniques.

Points to cover:

- This example includes both sexism and ageism.
- There must be some public response from someone—everyone on the list has seen this email, so everyone needs to see a response or they will think that behavior is normal.
- When people use "girlfriend" as the example, that has some other assumptions built-in: that the reader is male, heterosexual, and relatively young.

Preparation tips:

- Read the [Geek Feminism page](#) on the topic "So simple a mother could do it."

### **Tip: Charles Rules of Argument**

Often people have had such miserable experiences with flame wars—long back-and-forth discussions on mailing lists that escalate into name-calling or other unpleasant behavior—that they will refuse to consider replying publicly in these situations. [Charles' Rules of Argument](#)

[\(Geek Feminism edition\)](#) are a great way to help people feel like they can reply without giving up the next three days of their life. Short version:

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

### **Scenario: Racist criticism of a Black person's behavior**

A Black person in your community points out that a conference in your community has all white speakers. They do this on a social media platform that you actively use to participate in this community. Several other people criticize the Black person for being too abrasive, aggressive, loud, out of line, etc.

*Suggested discussion time: 6 minutes*

Ideal response:

- Reply publicly with "This is an example of the tone argument: [http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Tone\\_argument](http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Tone_argument)"
- Reply publicly with "Funny, when [WHITE MAN] does that, we all act like that's normal."
- Reply publicly with "I believe this is a serious problem and does not reflect my values. I support [BLACK PERSON]."
- Systemic response: Start counting people by gender, race, or other qualities whenever you see a group: in a meeting, on a board of directors, on a speakers page, etc. Raise concerns when a marginalized group you aren't part of is underrepresented before a member of that group brings it up.

Bad:

- Give advice to the person they are complaining about on how to present their argument better, seem less aggressive, etc.
- Argue that the person isn't actually aggressive, loud, etc. while implicitly accepting that these things are negative for Black people but are okay for white people.
- Send them a private message of support while not making a public statement of support—this is often asking the person to do emotional labor on your behalf by replying and saying, "It's okay, I know you aren't like that" or something similar.

Points to cover:

- Point out that this is a very specific stereotype: the "Angry Black Man" or "Angry Black Woman."
- Point out that this problem of being perceived as "too" aggressive, etc. applies to many other marginalized groups, especially women and disabled people.
- Discuss how the same behaviors may get different labels for privileged people and marginalized people, and some labels themselves are positive for privileged people but negative for marginalized people ("aggressive," "ambitious," "dominant").

### **Tip: The tone argument**

People use criticism of the way people say something (the "tone") as a way to ignore what people are saying. Often people interpret someone saying something that hurts their feelings as a problem with the way they are saying it (e.g., claiming they are "yelling" or "angry" when what they mean is that they felt guilt and shame when they listened to the words). Some subjects are inherently unpleasant for people in power to hear (such as "you have personally benefited from generations of colonial occupation and enslavement") and thus the tone argument will always apply. Learn more at: [http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Tone\\_argument](http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Tone_argument)

### **Scenario: People complain about the tone of your direct report**

You are a manager. People keep complaining to you about the tone of one of your direct reports, who is part of a marginalized racial/ethnic group. You have been present for every situation they are complaining about, and you think your direct report has been behaving the same way as the people who are part of the dominant race/ethnic group.

Ideal responses:

- "Hm. I was there, and I couldn't see that they were acting any differently than [NAME OF PERSON IN DOMINANT GROUP]."
- "The job description for this position includes contributing to discussions and advocating for their opinions. It sounds like they are fulfilling their job responsibilities."
- "If this is a problem, I think we need to look at the behavior of [NAME], [NAME], and really everyone in management first."
- "I also was initially put off by that behavior in [NAME OF PERSON IN DOMINANT GROUP] but I realized that that is how we do business around here. I'm happy to talk about changing the overall culture but [NAME] is acting just like everyone else."

Bad:

- Asking for more details. You were there! You have all the information you need.
- Arguing about whether or not your report's behavior was appropriate. The ground to stay on is that your direct report is behaving the same way as other people. You can have the argument about whether the organizational culture that produces this behavior in everyone is good or bad, but keep the focus off your direct report.

- Directly accusing them of racism or bias against that ethnic group. This person saying this is likely part of the dominant racial/ethnic group, who seldom have significant practice with discussing their own racism without becoming emotional and attacking other people. If they aren't perceiving their bias here, they probably can't have a productive discussion about that bias.
- Getting into discussions of their emotional state. Privileging of the emotions of the dominant group over the rights or equality of the marginalized group is part of how racial and ethnic hierarchies are maintained.

Points to cover:

- Many organizational cultures define leadership and other well-compensated activities as behaving in ways that are not acceptable for marginalized people. Some of those things are functional (e.g., self-advocacy, being decisive, moderating meetings effectively, giving difficult but helpful feedback) and some are dysfunctional (e.g. bragging, yelling, rudeness, humiliation, crude sexual references, breaking rules). Linking well-compensated activities with behavior that only powerful privileged people can get away with is one way that resources are reserved for the privileged. Your goal is to advocate for recognizing functional behaviors as acceptable coming from marginalized people, and to make dysfunctional behaviors unacceptable for everyone.

### **Scenario: "Let's not lower the bar"**

You are in a meeting about hiring more people from a marginalized group into positions of power. A colleague of yours says, "It's great to hire more people from this group, but let's not lower the bar." Before you can reply, another colleague says, "Oh yes, we'll be careful not to lower the bar."

Ideal responses

- "We're definitely not hiring people from this group in proportion to how many qualified people there are. So I think the problem we're facing is that we've lowered the bar for ourselves when it comes to finding qualified people in this group."
- "As someone who is not in this group, I have had the bar lowered for me plenty of times. And I've worked with plenty of people like me who clearly got the bar lowered for them. So I think it's a better use of our time to talk about how to make sure we aren't lowering the bar for people who fit the stereotype for this job."
- "If you have some data showing that this is a problem for us, I'd like to review it thoroughly because it would be very surprising if we are the only company in our industry that came up with a hiring process that is biased in favor of this group."
- Look really embarrassed and say, "Um, I don't think that's why we're having trouble hiring people in this group. Let's discuss after the meeting," and then change the subject.

- "I agree that we shouldn't lower the bar. We should review how often we're lowering the bar for the dominant group as that is probably exacerbating our hiring imbalances."

Bad:

- Any response that reinforces the unstated framing that the reason it is hard to hire people in this marginalized group is because they aren't as good at this job. No one says, "Let's not lower the bar" when they discuss hiring people from the privileged group; they understand that if they can't find someone to take the job, it's their hiring process or company culture or compensation package that is at fault.
- Say nothing. Someone made this statement, and another person confirmed it. If you are in a position to act as an ally, this is a key moment that will define the rest of the meeting.
- Get into a discussion of any individual person. This is about systemic bias and reinforcing the idea that members of a marginalized group are less qualified.

Points to cover:

- Sure, it's possible your organization already removed all the bias against this group from its search and hiring process, as well as its culture and compensation. If you had, you probably wouldn't be having this meeting.
- In this discussion we assume the company has set achievable hiring goals. Statistics are often available on the proportion of people with the necessary qualifications who are in this marginalized group; set the goal to that proportion. After all, you have had no trouble in hiring more people from the privileged group than their proportion of qualified people.
- Most organizations tie compensation to achieving the goals that they consider important. If meeting this hiring goal is important, it should be tied to the compensation of the people who do the hiring and manage the people being hired.

### **Tip: Reframe the assumption**

Assumption: at present, everyone has an equal chance of being hired

Reality: More marginalized people face a much a higher bar than people with more privilege, who often get a pass or exceptions to the process

Reframe: "Actually, the problem is that people in this group have to pass a higher bar, and we need to fix that."

### **Scenario: Performance reviews are biased against women**

You are part of the performance review process at your company. The feedback for several women include comments like "Needs to work on her communication style," or "too aggressive." Fewer men's reviews have the same problems.

**Presentation tip:** Immediately go to the next slide with a quote from the research before starting the discussion to show that it is a widespread problem of bias against women. Otherwise participants will spend most of their time talking about whether the woman actually was abrasive or if this was sexist.

*Suggested discussion time: 6 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- Go to management with a request to change the review process to be more objective and fair, and to discourage personality critiques. Ways to make reviews more objective include: simple 1-5 rating questions, limited opportunities for free-form text, systems that highlight language that suggests unconscious bias, explicit reminders of what unconscious bias is and what it looks like before filling out a review or making promotion decisions.
- Start a discussion about the culture of leadership at this organization. If the leadership culture is itself abrasive and otherwise incompatible with our stereotypes of a "good woman" but compatible with stereotypes about male leadership, this kind of imbalance in performance reviews is often a sign.
- Ask for unconscious bias training that results in people lowering their bias (some kinds of unconscious bias training make people feel like it is okay to have that bias and actually increase biased actions afterwards). Recommend training from [Paradigm IQ](#).
- Request that your company start using [Greenhouse](#), [Textio](#), and other software systems designed to highlight and reduce bias in interview feedback, performance reviews, job descriptions, and similar areas.

Bad:

- Ask the person who wrote the review to go into more detail about exactly what the women did. Presumably the idea is to show that the woman wasn't actually abrasive. But the problem is that many people are abrasive, but only high-status men get away with it.
- Talk to the women about how to appear less abrasive or get them training.

Points to cover:

- Point out that this also applies to Black people, people of color in general, people with disabilities, and other groups.
- At some point, ask the participants if they think the women in the company are actually more abrasive and aggressive than the men. This helps refocus on the problem: women can't behave in ways that men can, and often these forbidden behaviors are key to being a leader in their organization.
- If people ask what their position is in this scenario, tell them to talk about what they could do in their current position in this kind of situation: individual contributor, line manager,

head of HR, whatever. The workshop is about figuring out what our position of power is and what we can do in that position, not fantasizing about what we would do if we had more power.

- A different but related problem is failure to give women feedback that is specific enough to help them take their work to the next level. The feedback that helps people get promoted is specific and focused on showing that person's impact on business objectives.

### **Tip: Bias interrupters**

Bias interrupters are a three step process from the UC Hastings WorkLife Law Center useful for improving hiring, promotions, and other similar workplace systems. The steps are:

1. Use metrics to measure the current system
2. Implement bias interrupters
3. Repeat as needed

A detailed list of bias interrupters for workplace systems is at: <http://biasinterrupters.org/>

### **Scenario: New mother gets less prestigious assignments**

A woman in your company goes on maternity leave. You are discussing which projects to assign to people after she has returned, including one that is in her area of expertise and requires some travel. A co-worker says, "She has a small baby, I'm guessing she won't want to travel."

*Suggested discussion time: 5 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- Ask if the woman in question has said that she doesn't want to travel when she returns. If the answer is no, request that someone contact her to find out what her travel preferences are before assuming she won't want to travel.
- Systemic response: Have an explicit system in place for asking all employees about their travel preferences on a regular basis. Look into ways to support employees who need to travel regardless of gender or parental status: allowing caregivers to travel with them, paying for at-home support, reducing unnecessary travel.

Bad:

- Let planning go ahead without finding out what her travel preferences are.
- Only asking travel preferences from pregnant women.

Points to cover:

- Sexist discrimination against women often intensifies when they become mothers. The form discrimination often takes is assuming women don't want higher status assignments without actually consulting them.
- All employees can suddenly and unpredictably become unable to work for several months at a time. Acting as though pregnant women are the only people this happens to is discriminatory and puts your business in a precarious position.

### **Tip: What Works for Women at Work**

What Works for Women at Work by Joan C. Williams and Rachel Dempsey is what Lean In should have been—advice for women on how to survive workplace bias that acknowledges that systemic oppression exists and is wrong, and that women can mitigate its effects on them by choosing responses that vary by race, ethnicity, parental status, location, personal style, physical appearance, and other factors. More than half the women they interviewed for this book were women of color. There are four patterns they identify, but the most relevant one here is The Maternal Wall, in which people double down on stereotypes about women when they become mothers—it intensifies their femininity and all the stereotypes that go with it.

Extra info in case someone asks you about one of the other patterns:

1. Prove-it-again: People forget information that goes against their stereotypes, so women must repeatedly prove themselves over and over again. They also don't get promoted on potential, only on what they've already proven themselves able to do.
2. The Tightrope: Women have to walk a narrow line between being too feminine and not feminine enough. Too feminine and they violate stereotypes about good performers; not feminine enough and they violate stereotypes about how women behave.
3. The Maternal Wall: People double down on negative stereotypes about women when they become mothers—it intensifies their femininity and all the stereotypes that go with it.
4. Tug-of-war: Women end up fighting each other for limited resources because the powers that be create situations where women have to compete. For example, if an executive team of about ten people has exactly one woman, it is LESS likely that another woman will be promoted to that same level. Women act like there can be only one woman at a particular level because often that is actually true.

### **Scenario: Co-worker expresses transphobic opinions to you in private**

A co-worker comes out as trans. Another co-worker assumes you are cis and starts complaining to you privately about how ridiculous it is to expect everyone to start using your co-worker's new name and pronouns.

*Suggested discussion time: 6 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- “While it’s a challenge to remember the new names and pronouns, I personally think it’s totally reasonable to respect other people’s decisions about their name and gender.”
- “It’s hard and embarrassing for me to do this because I keep making mistakes, but then I think about how much harder it is for [CO-WORKER’S NEW NAME] to completely change their life and put up with all this transphobia. Really, they are doing something much harder and I am glad I can support them in being true to themselves.”
- If you don’t have the energy that day, “This conversation is making me uncomfortable. How about [CHANGE OF SUBJECT]?”

Bad:

- Changing the subject without saying why.
- Appearing to agree with them out of pure dislike of conflict—it’s fine if they have power over you and you think they might harm you if you don’t agree.

Points to cover:

- Point out that often people who take this approach believe that the majority of their peers agree with them, but are afraid to say so publicly. This is your chance to change that opinion.
- Point out that as uncomfortable as it is for them to confront this person, it is far more uncomfortable for the person being targeted to work with them or experience this behavior directly.

### **Tip: Read the Captain Awkward advice blog**

During this section, people are likely to ask questions like “How do I get someone to stop doing something bad without upsetting anyone?” (Hint: you can’t.) Direct them to the Captain Awkward advice blog: <http://captainawkward.com>. Captain Awkward answers questions on social interaction with specific suggested scripts and detailed explanations. You can also reframe this kind of question as, “Someone is already upset: you, and anyone else this behavior is harming.” Often the problem is we value the feelings of the more powerful person than those of less powerful people.

### **Scenario: Someone makes a sex joke at a work event, while drinking**

At a party at work, a male co-worker makes a joke about how much sex another male co-worker must have had in order to have so many children. Everyone is holding an alcoholic drink.

**Presentation tip:** Ask for a show of hands from people who have seen something like this happen. Explain what the “joke” is about: that it is considered a compliment to say that a man has had a lot of sex.

*Suggested discussion time: 8 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- "Awwwkward."
- "We don't do that around here."
- If the person making the joke is too powerful for you to confront, silently leave the area.
- Bring it up with the joker's manager after the event (or make an anonymous complaint to the board of directors if they are the CEO).
- If you laugh out of nervousness or surprise, collect yourself and say as quickly as possible, "I'm sorry, I wasn't laughing because that was funny, I was laughing because I was uncomfortable."
- Systemic response: Have a discussion at work about the rules still applying when people are drinking.
- Systemic response: Reduce signals that excessive alcohol consumption and associated bad behavior are welcome in your workplace (see Kara Sowles' "[Alcohol and Inclusivity: Planning Tech Events with Non-Alcoholic Options](#)", included on the example handout).

Bad:

- Wait for the woman who "usually" speaks up about these things to say something.
- Make a joke in reply. It is really hard to tell how serious people are in this context, and it is likely to backfire.
- Laugh or smile nervously but don't say anything or leave.

Points to cover:

- The following tip slides cover a lot of less-obvious issues that come up: homophobia, racism, religious discrimination, cis-sexism, strong feelings about fertility, pregnancy, and having babies, but this section will list the things that need to be addressed right away when they come up in discussion.
- Make sure people get that women can't win when co-workers are talking about sex: while for men there's a wide range of "acceptable" amounts of sex, women are either having too much sex or too little, and being judged for it.
- In the discussion, emphasize that workplace rules against sexual harassment and assault still apply when everyone is drinking.
- Point out that [research shows that alcohol does not physically cause people to become sexually inappropriate or violent](#)—that's all culturally mediated.
- Reassure people that it's okay if they giggle nervously or freeze up. It's okay to say, "I'm sorry, that wasn't actually funny, I just laughed because I was so surprised anyone would say that," or to wait and address it after the event if they are too shocked in the moment.

### **Tip: Why talking about sex at work is harmful**

In the previous scenario, people will often ask whether it's okay if everyone involved is male, or if there are any situations in which talking about sex at work is okay. These slides are an

opportunity to explain heterosexism's double standard for straight sex vs. gay sex, religious considerations, why reproductive status should be private, the sexual double standard for women, sexual objectification of women, and how talking about sex triggers discrimination against women. Read more about [objectification on the Geek Feminism wiki](#).

### **Tip: Myths about alcohol**

The immediate physiological effects of alcohol are:

- Loss of coordination
- Sleepiness
- Difficulty multitasking
- Everything else is culturally mediated

Read more at <http://www.sirc.org/publik/drinking4.html> and <https://blog.valerieaurora.org/2018/03/30/cross-post-alcohol-and-inclusivity-planning-tech-events-with-non-alcoholic-options/>.

### **Scenario: Coworker uses a term associated with marginalized groups as a criticism**

On an internal company chat channel with about 50 people, a co-worker is talking about a badly implemented software feature. They write, "That's so ghetto," followed by a smiling face emoji.

**Presentation tip:** Ask the class what the word "ghetto" means. Fill in any gaps so that they know it has a general meaning of "place where a marginalized group is forced to live and which is systematically oppressed by the government and/or dominant racial/ethnic group" and include at least two examples (e.g., Black people in the United States, Jewish people in pre-World War II Europe).

*Suggested discussion time: 6 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- Reply with "Wow." Then take another action if the comment is not corrected immediately.
- Reply publicly with "Do you mean that software is badly implemented?" and then talk about the software problem. Follow up afterward to make sure someone talks to them about the problem with using "ghetto" in this way.
- Reply publicly with "I don't like using a term for where marginalized people are forced to live to mean 'bad.' Do you mean that the software was written sloppily?" and then talk about the problem.
- Let the person who enforces the code of conduct in this chat channel know about what happened.
- If you have reason to think this person would care about your opinion, contact them privately and explain that they are using a term for where marginalized people are forced to live to mean "bad" and that reinforces negative stereotypes, and ask if that's what they

intended to do. Ideally, they respond publicly with a correction. If they don't, take some public action yourself.

- If your chat system allows, add an emoji reaction to their message that is unhappy or horrified.
- Contact the person's manager and let them know what happened.

Bad:

- Look up the definition of "ghetto" in Urban Dictionary and use the one positive definition to argue that it is being used positively here. It is not being used positively; it is being used as a synonym for "bad."
- Argue that ghettos are actually bad and it's okay to use the word as a metaphor for bad things.
- Suggest a different metaphor for badness based on a stereotype about a marginalized group.
- Do nothing.

Points to cover:

- Ghettos are bad because the dominant group deliberately makes them bad, but then blames the problems on the marginalized people being forced to live there. Using "ghetto" as a synonym for "bad" reinforces the stereotype of that marginalized group causing the badness through their own actions.
- If someone asks about using "ghetto" in a positive manner, explain that "ghetto" is a term in the process of being reclaimed by some marginalized people who are stereotyped as living in ghettos, but that it is currently at the stage where only members of those marginalized groups can use it this way (much like the n-word can currently only be used by people who are Black). The person in this scenario is not using it in a positive manner, so it does not matter whether or not they are part of a group that is stereotyped as living in a ghetto.

### **Tip: Have a concise code of conduct with examples**

- Have a short, clear, concise code of conduct that focuses on what not to do
- Specifically list forms of oppression or topics that are common (such as ableist language)
- Put everything else (values, how to be inclusive, etc.) in separate documents
- Hand over any dispute over CoC violations to an expert

### **Scenario: Exclusionary team building activity**

Your team announces that the next team-building offsite activity will be playing laser tag.

**Presentation tip:** Ask people to suggest groups of people who might not feel comfortable playing laser tag and get at least two suggestions before going to discussion (people often only think of one group and stop thinking about any others).

*Suggested discussion time: 6 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- Set up a wider review system for team building activities where more people can weigh in.
- Set up an anonymous review system for everyone on the team to express their opinion on future team-building activities.
- Allow people who couldn't be part of the last team building exercise to have veto rights on the next team building exercise.
- Make a list of marginalized groups you'd like to think about and test each activity suggestion against the list.

Bad:

- Anything that requires marginalized people to frequently be the person always saying "no" to fun things the rest of the group loves and explaining how they are excluded.
- Offering an alternative less fun activity for the people who are left out of the main activity in lieu of finding a more inclusive activity (alternatives are fine if they aren't a way to excuse a terrible main activity).

Points to cover:

- Laser tag excludes:
  - People with certain disabilities, illnesses, or injuries
  - People who have been socialized to not be aggressive, competitive, or violent (e.g., women), or people who just don't like those things
  - People who have had bad experiences with guns
  - Anyone who would be in danger of being shot or punished for carrying a gun in public (many marginalized racial and ethnic groups, women)
  - People whose religious beliefs or ethics are against violence
  - And probably more!
- No activity will include everyone; the best you can do is include most people in each activity, and be fair about who gets to be included this time around. Thinking about activities as "more inclusive," "somewhat inclusive," and "less inclusive" helps.

### **Tip: Inclusive offsites**

- Design your offsite meetings to be inclusive

- Make a list of marginalized groups and spend time researching how each might feel left out
- List of more inclusive and less inclusive offsites here:  
[https://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Inclusive\\_offsites](https://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Inclusive_offsites)

### **Scenario: Meeting decisions controlled by persistent talker**

In your team's weekly meeting, you notice that the decision ends up being whatever the loudest, most persistent talker wants to do, even when you think it is not the best solution. You also notice that more marginalized people are interrupted more often and speak for less time.

*Suggested discussion time: 5 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- Ask for more structure in the meeting, such as:
  - An agenda
  - Meeting roles: facilitator, timekeeper, moderator, notetaker
  - Set speaking times for each person, enforced by facilitator
  - Make and enforce rules about whose turn it is to speak (hand signals, person currently speaking chooses next speaker, speaking stick)
- Speak to the meeting organizer or the manager of the persistent talker and ask them to have a conversation about dominating the meeting.
- If you have a good relationship with the persistent talker and know they are open to change, have a conversation about whether they want to dominate meetings. If they are open to ideas, suggest:
  - Waiting twice as long before speaking
  - Waiting until half the other people have spoken before speaking
  - Asking more (short) questions of other people
  - Serving as moderator in the meeting and avoiding participating directly
- Start acting as moderator yourself: interrupt the persistent talker, invite other people to speak, praise the ideas of quieter or less assertive people.

Bad:

- Make a generic request to "be more considerate of others" or "take turns speaking" without naming or speaking to the persistent talker specifically.
- Announce new meeting rules without a plan and commitment to enforcing them.

Points to cover:

- Nobody likes this situation! People are usually grateful and happy when someone starts implementing changes so that they aren't being forced to do what the persistent talker wants all the time.
- Groups make better decisions when they get to hear more information from more people, and we are seeing that in this workshop.

### **Tip: Psychological safety**

- Psychological safety means an environment in which people take turns sharing information
- Google study showed the most productive and profitable teams have psychological safety
- Two elements: sensitivity to others' feelings, and conversational turn-taking (equal speaking time)
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological\\_safety](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychological_safety)

### **Scenario: Applicant is dismissive of marginalized interviewer**

You are part of a hiring committee. A woman interviewer reports that an applicant refused to make eye contact with her and seemed dismissive of her questions. A man who interviewed the same applicant reports that they were enthusiastic and warm, and advocates strongly for advancing the applicant to the next level.

*Suggested discussion time: 6 minutes*

Ideal responses:

- Support and agree with the woman interviewer.
- Praise the perceptiveness and judgement of the woman interviewer.
- Speak up to state your belief that all employees need to treat women as respectfully and warmly as they do men.
- Point out that if this is how the applicant treats a woman interviewer, they probably treat women worse when they have less power over them.
- Ask, "Is a belief in gender equality necessary for working here or not?"
- If there is truly doubt about the cause of the change in behavior between the two interviewers, ask to have more interviews with multiple women in a similar position of relative power.
- Add to the formal hiring rubric an item along the lines of "treats all interviewers respectfully regardless of power or privilege."

Bad:

- Ask whether the applicant is just uncomfortable with women because they are neurodivergent or from a culture where women are treated with less respect. If women work at your company, employees need to be able to work with women, and plenty of neurodivergent people and people from sexist cultures treat women respectfully.

### **Tip: Listen to and amplify marginalized voices**

- Marginalized people are the early warning system for harmful employees: they often see the signs first

- If you aren't a member of the marginalized group, you may have difficulty believing experiences like these
- When a marginalized person shares these experiences, view it as a valuable, limited time learning opportunity
- Amplify and back up these kinds of reports

### **Scenario: "I don't see color"**

While talking about an incident of structural racism in the news, a colleague of yours who is part of the dominant racial group says proudly, "My parents raised me not to see color."

Ideal responses:

- "I decided to talk less about how un-racist I am and talk more about how to stop the racism that is happening."
- "I heard that 'I don't see color' sounds like 'I don't see people being racist to you' and so I stopped saying it."
- "It feels good to feel like I'm not the problem, but now I want to be part of the solution. And that means seeing race so that I notice when unfairness is happening."
- "I'd like to keep the topic on the effects of racism. Now, about that racist incident..."

Bad:

- Nothing.
- "I don't see color either."
- "I know you aren't racist, but other people..."

Points to cover:

- This is an example of recentering the conversation away from the virtues and feelings of the privileged person and back on to the actual problem: structural racism with horrific outcomes that are far worse than someone's ego being bruised.
- By shifting the conversation from what we *don't* do to what we *do* and *can do* we can stay in a solution-oriented mindset.

## About Frame Shift Consulting

Frame Shift Consulting is the leading provider of the [Ally Skills Workshop](#) worldwide. Our clients include Fortune 500 companies such as [Google](#), [Airbnb](#), and [Square](#), small startups, conferences, universities, law firms, and nonprofits. Our extensive experience in the technology industry gives us unique insight into the challenges of training at tech companies. Learn more about our work on our [press page](#).

### Kendall "Boo Boo Howse"

Principal consultant Kendall "Boo Boo" Howse is an award-winning designer, marketing strategist, and DEI leader in the technology sector. He has been teaching the [Ally Skills Workshop](#) since 2018. He became Frame Shift's lead facilitator in 2023 after 5 years of working closely with the founder, Valerie Aurora. He brings particular expertise in anti-racism as well as ally skills to leading both the Ally Skills Workshop and the [Ally Skills Workshop Train-the-trainers](#). Kendall is an accomplished speaker and has been an activist and advocate for more than 25 years, focusing on practical anti-racism strategies. He is also an artist, writer, and musician who has lived, worked, or performed across the U.S. and around the world. Learn more about Kendall [here](#).

### Valerie Aurora

Valerie Aurora is the primary author of the [Ally Skills Workshop](#) and the Ally Skills Workshop Train-the-trainers. Beginning in 2012, she taught ally skills to thousands of people around the world. Since 2015 she has trained more than 350 ally skills facilitators. She is the co-founder and former executive director of the [Ada Initiative](#), a non-profit that supported women in open technology and culture, as well as the lead author of "[Responding to Code of Conduct Reports](#)." She was also a software engineer at Red Hat, IBM, and Intel, as well as an independent software consultant. As of 2023, she is retired from ally skills and code of conduct training.

Read more about us at: <https://frameshiftconsulting.com/>