

Are We Good Allies to First Nations?

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Wednesday, December 04, 2013

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This is what solidarity looks like; make sure it's authentic!

Lots of us care about deepening relationships with and social/economic/political justice for first peoples. It's hard to come in, though, sometimes as a person from an oppressor or settler class. But there is a good checklist to make sure we're actually contributing effectively.

It's hard to know how to live humility, sincerity and really really good listening to make sure we are not a hindrance, but this Ally Bill of Responsibilities does a good job of helping us be mindful of humility, and maintaining a sincere focus on assisting those who are oppressed, and not taking up everyone's airtime, particularly if we're from a class that is used to entitlements to air time.

Enjoy, and let this enrich your spirit and activism!

Ally Bill of Responsibilities

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Responsible Allies:

1. Do not act out of guilt, but rather out of a genuine interest in challenging the larger oppressive power structures;
2. Understand that they are secondary to the Indigenous people that they are working with and that they seek to serve. They and their needs must take a back seat;
3. Are fully grounded in their own ancestral history and culture. Effective allies must sit in this knowledge with confidence and pride; otherwise the “wannabe syndrome” could merely undermine the Indigenous people’s efforts;
4. Are aware of their privileges and openly discuss them. This action will also serve to challenge larger oppressive power structures;
5. Reflect on and embrace their ignorance of the group’s oppression and always hold this

- ignorance in the forefront of their minds. Otherwise, a lack of awareness of their ignorance could merely perpetuate the Indigenous people's oppression;
6. Are aware of and understand the larger oppressive power structures that serve to hold certain groups and people down. One way to do this is to draw parallels through critically reflecting on their own experiences with oppressive power structures. Reflecting on their subjectivity in this way, they ensure critical thought or what others call objectivity. In taking this approach, these parallels will serve to ensure that non -Indigenous allies are not perpetuating the oppression;
 7. Constantly listen and reflect through the medium of subjectivity and critical thought versus merely their subjectivity. This will serve to ensure that they avoid the trap that they or their personal friends know what is best. This act will also serve to avoid the trap of naively following a leader or for that matter a group of leaders;
 8. Strive to remain critical thinkers and seek out the knowledge and wisdom of the critical thinkers in the group. Allies cannot assume that all people are critical thinkers and have a good understanding of the larger power structures of oppression;
 9. Ensure that a community consensus, or understanding, has been established in terms of their role as allies. Otherwise, the efforts of the people will be undermined due to a lack of consultation and agreement;
 10. Ensure that the needs of the most oppressed – women, children, elderly, young teenage girls and boys, and the disabled – are served in the effort or movement that they are supporting. Otherwise, they may be engaging in a process that is inadequate and thus merely serving to fortify the larger power structures of oppression. Alternatively, their good intentions may not serve those who need the effort most. Rather, they may be making the oppression worse;
 11. Understand and reflect on the prevalence and dynamics of lateral oppression and horizontal violence on and within oppressed groups and components of the group, such as women, and seek to ensure that their actions do not encourage it;
 12. Ensure that they are supporting a leader's, group of leaders', or a movement's efforts that serve the needs of the people. For example, do the community people find this leader's efforts useful, interesting, engaging, and thus empowering? If not, allies should consider whether the efforts are moving in a questionable or possibly an inadequate direction, or worse yet that their efforts are being manipulated and thus undermined, possibly for economic and political reasons;
 13. Understand that sometimes allies are merely manipulatively chosen to further a leader's agenda versus the Indigenous Nations', communities', or organizations' concerns, and when this situation occurs act accordingly;
 14. Do not take up the space and resources, physical and financial, of the oppressed group;
 15. Do not take up time at community meetings and community events. This is not their place. They must listen more than speak. Allies cannot perceive all the larger oppressive power structures as clearly as members of the oppressed group can; And finally,
 16. Accept the responsibility of learning and reading more about their role as effective allies.

Chi-Miigwetch!

Here is the poster version: [ally_bill_of_responsibilities_poster](#)

