MEN AS ALLIES

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Evidence-based practical steps for men and women to identify what it means, and how to be a positive ally

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ABOUT ROAR! TRAINING

We are a training company committed to levelling the professional playing field. We empower teams through evidence-based training and coaching that delivers practical results. We identify issues within the workplace that can, consciously or unconsciously, create an unequal environment for progression. Using the latest research, we help people build their confidence, communicate more effectively or understand how to be a better ally to their co-workers.

"Over the course of my career, I have interacted with dozens, if not hundreds, of well-intentioned individuals who struggle to navigate the nuances of what it means to be a “good ally” in the workplace. In other words, there doesn’t seem to be a universally accepted answer to the question how can men* best professionally support women*.

RESEARCH GOALS

In a world where nearly half (47%) of men do not believe that women are treated equally in the workplace and over half (54%) of women actively feel as though their gender has negatively affected their career progression, this question is as pertinent today as it was half a century ago.

Recently, I noticed a spate of sexism happening in the tech industry and the social response to this varied hugely from person to person. Some people called out the behaviour, intentionally outing and shaming the perpetrators. Others defended them, stipulating it best to focus on positive change. Some women felt as though we were being spoken on behalf of, others felt supported. Some men were outraged by the sexism, other men felt personally attacked.

Most pertinent to me, however, was that those contributing in the conversation were, for the most part, well meaning, but it was a mess, and the differences in discourse were making it messier." - Kirsty Hulse, Roar! Training Founder.

The goal of this research is to try and identify an evidence based framework for how to be a "good male ally" that we can collectively draw upon.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research goal: Is there an evidence based framework on how to be, and encourage, positive male allies?

Men as Allies: Engaging Men to Advance Women in the Workplace, a research report from Bentley University, defines a male ally as “a man who will advocate for women even when there are no women in the room.”

This report contains:

- Synthesis of recent research to understand the current thinking and recommendations.
- Quantitative data from over 600 male and female respondents from a broad cross section of workplaces, cultures and levels of seniority to define how gender equality in the workplace is currently perceived.
- Quantitative and qualitative data from over 600 male and female respondents from a broad cross section of workplaces, cultures and levels of seniority to define a framework of how we collectively believe we can be good allies.

*We recognise that this positions gender as binary and that, for many, this is a reductive distinction. For those who may not identify with this definition of gender, you can find further support and information on the topic in the resources section.
There is a disparity between women who feel as though their gender negatively affects their career and men's perceptions on inequality. A theory based on the qualitative research is that men perceive "opportunities" (being considered for promotion) to be the same and potentially dismiss the impact of "treatment" (being the object of "locker room humour").

In support of this, over half (51%) of female respondents report a general sense of wanting to "be believed" when they discuss or report inequality.

Several male and female respondents reported that the "open sharing of salary information" would help gender parity.

Wanting progression to be primarily "merit based" is cited as important for both men and women.

Having an "awareness of bias" and inherent differences is reported as being an important route to gender parity by both men and women.

Some female respondents think direct action, for sexist behaviour to be "called out", is a positive route to gender equality. Others respond preferring to "handle it ourselves".

Based on this, the recommendation for male coworkers is to ask female coworkers how best they can support the individual, based on her preferences.

Nearly all (92%) of female respondents report wanting an open dialogue, where issues can be addressed together, discussed on a case by case basis.
CURRENT PERCEPTIONS

How do men currently perceive inequality in the workplace?

For many (65%) of male respondents, female co-workers are offered the same opportunities as them and 10% believe their female co-workers are offered more opportunities than them. Though nearly a third (31%) have experienced a co-worker being treated unfairly because of her gender. There seems to be a distinction between parity in terms of opportunity (being considered for promotion) and treatment (being the object of "locker room humour").

65% of male respondents believe their female co-workers are treated equally in the workplace.

31% have experienced a coworker being treated unfairly in the office because of their gender.

91% of male respondents define gender equality is being either important, or extremely important, to them.

71% of male respondents actively support gender equality in the workplace.

A large majority (91%) respond that gender equality is either important, or extremely important, to them. However less, 71%, actively support gender equality in the workplace. This is likely due to a sense of either "not knowing what I should do" or "women are best to fix it".
CURRENT PERCEPTIONS

How do women currently perceive inequality in the workplace?

Over half (54%) of female respondents report believe that their gender has negatively affected their career progression and 48% report having missed out on specific, significant opportunities. 22% do not feel as though their gender has negatively affected their career progression and a nearly quarter (24%) are unsure.

- **54%** of female respondents believe that their gender has negatively affected their career progression.
- **48%** of female respondents report having missed out on a raise, promotion, key project or opportunity for advancement because of their gender.
- **27%** of those female respondents who believe their gender have negatively affected their career, 27% have been supported by male coworkers.
- **64%** of female respondents believe their gender will make it harder for them to advance their career.

27% of female respondents have been actively supported by a male co-worker when being treated unfairly in the workplace. 56% were not actively supported and 17% unsure. A higher number of respondents (64%) feel as though their gender will make it harder for them to advance, suggesting positions of seniority seem harder to attain.
FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

What do men feel are the best ways to support their female co-workers?

1. **Listen**
   
   "Listen. Always consider how your behaviour and actions feel to those around you."

   "Listen more, support more"

2. **Unobserved**
   
   "Nipping behind the scenes “locker room” talk"

   "I’ve had terrible managers go unchecked and say really vile sexist shit behind closed doors. We need to stamp THAT out."

   "Become more self aware of “boy’s club” scenarios, where it’s all men in the room, meeting up then talking about work."

3. **Awareness**

   "I think it starts with ‘us men’ being aware that there is an issue and actively looking out for it. I think earlier in my career I wasn’t as aware of the issues as they didn’t affect me, so missed the signals that it was happening."

   "Education needs to come first, I'm not convinced men in the workplace actually understand gender prejudice and its many (often discrete) manifestations."

   "Be aware that everyone has biases and that the default workplace bias is against women."

   "Be aware of unconscious bias. Be empathetic. Be aware of our own privilege."
FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

What do men feel are the best ways to support their female co-workers?

"Be respectful and treat everyone as equals based on merit"

"Don't make concessions, don't make women equal (because that actually puts a cap on achievement if it needs to be equal), given everyone the fair chance they deserve and respect their choices on merit with an open mind and if they deserve more, give them more!"

"I'm not personally a fan of hiring quotas for genders or minorities, but I am a fan of candidate quotas, then hiring based on merit. I think one tangible way men can be allies."

"I can't fathom how gender is even an issue - it's all about the person and their unique skill set. Who cares if you are male or female?"

"To never be quiet about these issues because silence is tacit endorsement of the status quo."

"Speak up when women are silenced and regularly offer women a time to speak."

"Active mentorship and recognition. Active patrolling for bad behavior and public advocacy for equality and equal pay."

"Actively, visually, verbally encourage & support female colleagues in challenging situations"

"Calling out examples of gender inequality either in person or through HR."
FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

What do men feel are the best ways to support their female co-workers?

"Don't speak out on their behalf, but in support of them and their ideas."

"I think men should always be mindful that they are not there to "Stick up" for women in the work place. Women can stick up for themselves. However, I think it's always useful to ask your colleagues "Are you Ok" "Can i help?"

"Talk about the issues freely"

"Share salary information with other coworkers. If there are noticeable disparities in equity, say something - frame it in a way that's approachable if this is a difficult conversation to have."

"Talk about your salary to women you work with so they have more information going into negotiations."
"Not all men are the same. We're people. Stop grouping us. Stop blaming us all for the actions of idiots."

"When women stop making excuses and considering men the enemy. You cannot wrongfully accuse someone of being against you and expect them to support you. The issue lies in big part with women as well. Have you ever seen women support each other like you expect men to do?"

"I think it's getting to a stage where women are alienating men to the extent where they are beginning to avoid speaking up through fear of offending. I can't win and so begin to avoid sharing any opinion regarding gender neutrality, be it positive or negative, through fear of offending and being labelled."

It is worth noting that within this research, these perceptions are very much within the minority, and the vast majority of male responses (94%) are focused around wanting to acknowledge a difficult situation, and being open to discovering how to positively influence change. However, it is seemingly behaviour from this 6% that can have a lasting negative impact on how women feel treated within the workplace, regardless of the efforts of the vast majority of male coworkers.

In other words, it appears that the few are affecting the many.
**FUTURE SUGGESTIONS**

What do women feel are the best ways for men to support them?

1. **Believe**
   - "Believe our stories."
   - "Believe that I feel mistreated when I say I am."
   - "Pay attention to what female colleagues say. I have been working over two decades, and the predominant feeling is that of being invisible."
   - "Trust what we say without questioning it."
   - "Being open to listening to how women feel, and want to learn more/be proactive in helping to become an ally."
   - "Sometimes [men] think they know the answer without listening to the context. So just listen."
   - "Listen to feedback women have and make sure any actions you take are based on that feedback and problems."

2. **Listen**
   - "By being aware of bias, both males and females can understand each other better. I have been guilty of assuming that an older, white, male in the finance industry is going to talk down to me because I am a young female, but this is my own bias."
   - "They can stop the cycle by reflecting on some of their own biases. Once they identify the biases, they should actively work to act differently."
   - "Do their own inner work to free their minds from conditioned thinking."
   - "Acknowledge the differences."
FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

What do men feel are the best ways to support their female co-workers?

"Don't speak out on their behalf, but in support of them and their ideas."

"I think men should always be mindful that they are not there to "Stick up" for women in the work place. Women can stick up for themselves. However, I think it's always useful to ask your colleagues "Are you Ok" "Can i help?"

"Gender should not be a differentiator when it comes to allies, we should all be recognised on own merit, and should support one another - for example everyone in a meeting should be heard"

"focus on our skills, experience and abilities which allow us to get our work done."

"Men feel like putting women first is classed as equality, but positive discrimination is just as bad than inequality. [Instead of] saying a woman should do something because they ‘we need a girl on the team’ or ‘we need diversity’, they should actually be asking is if the right people are in the room have the right skills."

"Not laughing along with sexist ‘workplace banter"

"Stop having sexist jokes"

"Reduce the amount of gender focused ‘banter’, and stop making 'jokes' about political correctness gone mad."
FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

What do men feel are the best ways to support their female co-workers?

"Call out people who perpetuate inequities through their comments and actions, even those made in jest."

"If you’re a manager of women and you know they aren’t being paid fairly - stand up for it. If a woman is voicing concern over a situation at work that is overtly gendered, help her do something about it"

"Speaking out when they hear or see another man doing something wrong"

"To point out they think something is blatantly gender biased or for example if positions of power in a company are largely taken up by men to point out that enough leadership roles are assumed by women."

"By both men and women working together to openly address issues"

"It means a lot more when a diverse group of people come forward and say “this is wrong” vs when it’s just a group of women calling everything out."

"It would be amazing to see more men mentor more junior women so that they could advance into more senior roles."

"Not be scared to voice equality. Not be scared of being "unmanly" for sticking up for feminist issues and working on it together."
"Part of the reason I would say my career hasn’t soared is because I have had two children and therefore been on leave twice. You could argue that it was my decision to have the children BUT is was also my husbands"
FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

What do men feel are the best ways to support their female co-workers?

"My boss (a man) was asked to form a taskforce on gender equality in the workplace and accepted. I feel he should have stepped aside and let a woman lead, as the resulting meetings were very awkward - he was the only man in the room and it was difficult for us to talk openly about the issues or trust that he would take them forward in our best interests."

It is worth noting that on occasion, policies are put in place to create an environment for female employees feel supported, though this results in the opposite.

In particular, several women cited office celebrations of 'International Women's Day' as making them feel awkward and uncomfortable. "International women's day. Buying flowers for all the women in the office. It's weird."

"We were celebrating international women's day in the office and a few of the men were trying to get on board but it ended up being stereotypical".

"A man on our team bought all the women on our team chocolates to celebrate international women's day...?"

"We celebrated International Women's Day by all wearing pink. Meanwhile, our CEO refused to do a salary analysis to ensure we were all being paid the same.

Equally, several women reported feeling patronised when a men stepped up in a meeting to ensure they had their voice heard. "The client was giving me a very hard time so my male colleague decided to talk over me and interrupt to answer the question and regain control. Although he may have thought that this was the best thing to do in the situation this ultimately undermined me in front of the client"

"I was once interrupted by the [male] CEO, and my boss interrupted him and demanded he let me finish. I was mortified. I could have handled it myself."
IN SUMMARY

The route to both achieving gender parity in the workplace, and ensuring those within businesses feel their is a commitment to this is undoubtedly nuanced, complex and subjective.

This research suggests there is an agreed start point when addressing the issue of gender equality in the workplace.

1. **Listening** and **believing** what is being reported. Many report that their male co-workers do not "believe" how they feel, which is supported by a disparity by between female reporting how they feel in the workplace, and male perceptions.

2. Having an **awareness of bias** that may be informing actions and decisions is cited as important for both men and women to begin working towards true gender parity.

3. Creating an **open dialogue** so that issues can be addressed according to a specific individuals needs.

There is seemingly no "rule" as to whether sexist behaviour ought be openly called out, or the role of male allies is to facilitate positive change in the background. This is entirely subjective to the individual, and seemingly differs depending on which stage of their careers they are in.

Based on this, **the most effective male allies are those whom discuss openly their biases, actively listen to their female coworkers and ask how their female colleagues would best like to address these issues.**

For any more questions or thoughts on this research, please contact kirsty@roar.training
FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES


https://www.stonewall.org.uk/get-involved/get-involved-individuals-communities/trans-allies-programme

https://hbr.org/2018/10/how-men-can-become-better-allies-to-women


https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/%20archive/2014/01/the-daddy-track/355746/

https://leanin.org/

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