

## Steps to Change Podcast: Episode 2

**Host:** Hello, and welcome to this episode of Steps to Change. The podcast where we explore learning and development topics, organisational behaviour change and practical ways to inspire people to act differently. Through the lens of our Steps to Change model; See it, Own it, Change it and Live it. On this episode, we're exploring the question; what is Allyship? And what does it mean to be an Active Ally? We'll breakdown the concept, considering what it is and the positive impact being an ally can have on individuals and organisations and as with all of our episodes give you, dear listeners some suggestions to support you on your journey of being an Active Ally. I'm your host Allen Liedkie and joining me as our guest on this episode, is Shane Taylor. Hello Shane, welcome to the podcast. How are you?

**Interviewee:** Hi Allen, I'm well thank you very much for asking. I'm really happy to be here, really encouraged that these conversations are happening, so this is exciting.

**Host:** Well, thank you for joining us and Shane for the listeners out there give us a bit of background about yourself, in terms of maybe what you do at Steps and some of your background in the subject matter.

**Interviewee:** Sure, I'd love to. So, I have been with steps at least internally for the past two months, as a Project and Design Manager, after working with Steps, as an associate, I like to say as a partner, for about 10 plus years in the capacity of both an Actor / Lead Facilitator and also a programme or content designer and yeah and so, I'm really thrilled that now I have the opportunity to join internally, after many years of working on this type of subject matter. I've been very passionate over the years about diversity, equity and inclusion and really trying to find ways, find opportunities where I could really contribute on a larger scale, so I'm thankful to Steps for that.

**Host:** Well, absolutely, thank you for your contribution this episode, really appreciate it. So, Shane let's get into the topic at hand, what is allyship? For the listeners out there, who maybe have come across this term or maybe you've never heard it before, help us out with a little bit of understanding, so, we can have a shared reference point of this subject matter, what is allyship?

**Interviewee:** Sure Allen, thank you for that. I think to me I was saying my, my personal definition of allyship is it really has to do with individuals within organisations redirecting their power and privilege to create space for people from marginalised groups or communities. I think once this happens within the organisation it actually creates opportunities for these individuals within marginalised groups to be seen, to be heard and to be valued, which is ultimately the goal for all individuals within organisations.

**Host:** You know, just to kind of double click~~ed~~ out into that concept, Shane for the listeners out there, you know being an ally, what does that actually mean? So, we've got this definition here but in principle, in an everyday thing, what does that actually mean being an ally?

**Interviewee:** Well, I think it's important that we look at allyship as a verb. It's actually the act of doing something, doing something in support of specifically individuals from these marginalised groups. Whether it is supporting one of these individuals in a meeting, whether it is diversifying the meetings that you are going to within your organisation, whether it is you know assisting the individual in having a voice in the room, a place at the meeting table. I think that's very important, and I think what's crucial is that it's all within each

individual's power to do so, it's not a big ask but it is an essential ask. I think in order for allyship to work, I think we all have to be ally's for each other, no matter what level, what position we are in within that organisation, it needs to be an intentional group effort an all hands on deck approach, if you will to inclusion and allyship is a big part of that.

**Host:** So, when we partner with clients in this subject matter, something that is a reoccurring theme from the organisations that we've worked within this space is that, you know, most people don't show up to work with the intention of not being inclusive, right. For the most part people want to be a force for good and you know, contribute and be a supportive and being an ally, or being inclusive, whatever it may be but you know if we think about the Steps to Change model, in the See it, Own it, Change it, Live it process that we support clients going through on the journey to being an active ally, that See it piece, of really holding up that mirror to the current behaviours that are taking place, that are supporting allyship, or maybe not supporting a good culture of allyship, what is slightly different that I have found in these programmes is a lot of times we hold up a mirror to what are the behaviours that aren't helpful? But actually, with allyship, as people start to understand the concept, you're not showing them the behaviours that are showing up, you're trying to articulate the behaviours that aren't showing up. So, when we're designing this content in this work with them, we are effectively saying watch this scenario play out, where the missed opportunities for it because then I think those are the a-ha moments people start to have of going, 'oh, sugar, you know, I really, I think I'm an ally but if I watch that play out, am I really being an ally?' And I'm just curious from your perspective, you know in delivering these programmes but also designing these programmes, what's been your kind of take on that approach?

**Interviewee:** First, let me say that I think when we involve ourselves with these, with our partners, in this work, I think, which is how I like to refer to our clients, right. I think what is encouraging is that for the most part when we enter into those situations, organisations are very good about acknowledging a need for change and also articulating this is something that they want to do, they want to do better, they want to go from good to great, right. So, I think this idea of holding up a mirror to the organisations it helps them with that and this experience of I guess reflection and heightened awareness that we cultivate in our programmes is something that I think they actually can carry on through their everyday business because it allows them to, I don't wanna say jumping from See it, in the Steps to Change model but it does sort of allow them to go from seeing it, to living it, you know because it increases their awareness. Which I think is one of the key criteria for being an ally is having the awareness to know when you are actively being an ally and also having the awareness to know when you're actually dropping the ball and I think our work really allows you to develop a language, in order to heighten that awareness.

**Host:** It's that sense of that journey is a real stand out point for me because you know it sounds probably a little bit cliché, but I'll say it anyways, you know being an active ally it's a journey, it's not a destination, right and it's the, it's the stuff we're doing everyday to kind of develop these skills and there's no like finished product in this space. It could be a kind of a daunting journey to start and so, I would be curious to hear about, you know, what are those kind of barriers? What's that kind of fear factor that people might have at the start of this journey, that's going to maybe keep them from even engaging in this?

**Interviewee:** I think that fear is debilitating but I think my advice dealing with fear is to walk through that fear, to walk into that discomfort and try something, do something. I think it's important that we all listened to our instincts. certainly, you may not immediately recognise when something goes wrong within the organisation but 9 times out of 10 your instincts will not lie to you, you know. So, if you feel that something is amiss, you feel that something is wrong, more than likely that is the case and I think should trust your instincts, make the choice to say something, or do something. The other challenge I think to becoming an

active ally is privilege and again, that's something that needs to be to be acknowledged and owned so to speak, in order to I think move on but I mean, although privilege can be major challenge to becoming an active allyship, there are ways to overcome it and much of it has to do with self-reflection, getting to know where you stand, and who you are, and who you represent.

**Host:** And I would also add to that I think, you know, sometimes in this work when we say the word privilege that really gets people's defences up, right. They start to go well, ooh hold on a minute, I wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth, I've had to work really hard for where I am in life and I think just to be really clear, in terms of it, you know look you have the right to feel the way you feel about that word, we're not here to kind of tell you how to feel about it but the journey of being an effective active ally is kind of recognising that and being aware of what is afforded to you because of that privilege is a really crucial part of this journey because once you've recognised that privilege and as a sidebar, I heard somebody talking about privilege as a tailwind, so where in your life have you had tailwinds, that you didn't even realise you had that helped you sort of glide more effortlessly through things and lack of privilege is those headwinds where have you had a moment where you feel like you're kind of just butting your head against the wall, you can't make any progress and so forth and that had really helped me understand, you know objectively about privilege, about going, well, if I'm really honest with myself I've had a lot of ease in one place and then you can start to have a bit more empathy around the space, about of, you know where are you providing tailwinds for individuals and marginalised groups? And where are you removing those headwinds?

**Interviewee:** I think we all need to be able to harness our power because we each have power to change, even in small increments, you know it just takes one action to shift the axis of a culture, within an organisation, so, I'm not going to let folks off the hook there. I feel like, you know, if you're not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. I don't think we can afford to rest on our laurels, to sit back on our heels, you know, I feel like we all can do something, whether it is raising our voice, whether it is supporting an initiative, showing up, you know, we all show up in different ways, right. So, back to this point of the fear, I think for me personally, I think from what I've seen, I think the See it and Own it part of our methodology is probably the most challenging, once you acknowledge that there are certain behaviours that are showing themselves that do not contribute to a, an inclusive culture I think it's much easier to get to the Change it and living it because then you are acknowledging that something isn't right, that there it may be an issue at hand that needs to be resolved. So, I find even in the room, I see this in in our participants, I see when they recognised that there is a need for change, they are open to changing and I think that's so great about, you know, the type of work that we are doing. It's important to note that failure, not getting it right is part of the journey, that's part of the journey and I think that's something we need to start stepping into that discomfort a bit, okay I may not get it right but at least I'm trying something. I'm not in this state of stillness, you know, or inactivity if you will, I'm actually doing something. Again, it could start with a simple action, or simple behaviour, this idea of being an ally.

**Host:** So, Shane, I'd be interested to hear from you some of the things that have come out of sessions that participants can do immediately following a session, what are the things they can be doing right afterwards to be an active ally but then also, what's that kind of long-term strategy here for individuals and organisations, in terms of allyship?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, sure Allen. I think immediately some takeaways for participants that they can actually immediately put into action, things like lifting others up by advocating for them, making sure that no one ever feels that they're alone, or their point is not being heard. I think you can also share growth opportunities with others, you know, information is meant to be shared, so, you know, be a mentor, be a sponsor for someone, that's easy enough to do. You want to also recognise systemic inequalities and realise

the impact of microaggressions, and you want to believe under represented people's experiences and as far as long term, I think the first step and anyone's journey to being a more effective active ally, is to educate yourself, educate yourself about what's actually taking place within the culture of your organisation, educate yourself about your own behaviour, your own contributions and do not put the onus of your learning on those individuals from underrepresented groups, I think that's very important. Also, owning your privilege, certainly, we all are privileged in some way, no matter what group you represent or identify with but it's important to understand what your own privilege is and how you can use that privilege to become a better ally for individuals, to help them create space, as we mentioned earlier. Also, be open to accepting feedback as well, how am I doing with this? Is there anything that you can offer me, you can share with me? I think that's very important to always be open to feedback, as you embark on this journey to be an effective ally. Also, if you see something going wrong in your organisation, speak on it, you know, like have a, open up a conversation about it, don't just let it go. I mean we all have to have each other's back so to speak in this, so, if you observe something that is not necessarily contributing to an inclusive culture, then I think we have the responsibility, as ally's, welcome to the club, to speak up on it for sure, so that's something that I could offer.

**Host:** That's really helpful, Shane and I think in terms of you know, a few things that stood out for me there is sometimes these concepts can be really big, they feel really big and almost too big for an individual to start engaging with but you know this, those practical everyday things that some of the things that stood out for me was, you know, that believing underrepresented groups experience, like you know that really is powerful because just because it's not my experience doesn't mean that it's not someone else's experience, so, you know, if somebody says it's true for them, it's true and so how can you help shift anything that's not helpful, if it's harmful experience, if it's a barrier to inclusion or allyship and you know sometimes it's just about reaching across the aisle, like thinking about the people that you work with on a regular basis, are they people that you just gravitate towards naturally? Probably, if I'm honest I do that, I have the people that I just gel with really easily within an organisation, to the people that I work with and I have to be really conscious of going, am I always reaching out to that person? Why haven't I reached out to this person? And just making that active conscious choice to extend my networks and grow my relationships because you know, that's when people started to come into the fold and you learn and you understand things from other people shoes, right. You start to develop that empathy muscle, which is crucial I think in this journey and other things we've heard from organisations is from a strategic point is really building allyship capabilities and measurements into performance reviews, right. So, how can you give people behavioural expectations that you want to see them contributing to, as part of the overall values and goals and drive of the organisation, within their particular roles? And as you said Shane, earlier you said it doesn't have to just be leadership, yes, they play an important part to set the tone and really lead by example, but everybody can be an ally here, so, how does that show up from leadership through to individual contributors' expectations?

**Interviewee:** To that point on I think listening, I think we tend to take for granted when we're talking about the journey in becoming an active ally, I think listening is one of the key elements to that, I mean that's how you gather all of your information, that's how you really educate yourself by listening to other people's experiences. I think that's important.

**Host:** What for you has come out of maybe sessions that you have been a part of as an actor facilitator or lead facilitator? Some of the examples, or you know good news stories that have come out of that, that have really been powerful. I'm putting you on the spot here with that, but anything that you can remember from, from sessions that you been a part of that have really, been a real a-ha moment I think for people.

**Interviewee:** Sure, I think a lot of those experiences for me have been directly tied to the drama. I mean I can't tell you how many times I've had individuals, specifically individuals from marginalised communities come up to me afterwards and say to me directly, "wow, that was me in that scene, that happens to me all the time," "what your character experienced in that meeting happens to me on a day-to-day basis" and my goodness, it's you can actually see not only the light bulbs go off in the eyes of these individuals that, you see these the temperature in having these conversations with but you are, in the room changes when we hold up that mirror because they really start to see that it's real, because we were very clear that situations are coming out of the research, coming out of our the conversations we have with participants from each of the organisations. So, I think that is one of our greatest techniques I think is using the drama to create a reality for the individuals in the room. Again, have the light bulb moments, the a-ha moments, if you will are numerous when that happens.

**Host:** I think the thing that stands out for me there, is so powerful when a participant will come up to afterwards and say you know that was me, thank you for bringing that to this discussion. So, then I think you know, the being able to reflect that honestly and realistically in the scenarios, provides similar light bulb moments because if you're not a member of a marginalised group you probably don't experience things in this way, you can't right. So, if people aren't, you know, clearly told this is happening and this is why it's not inclusive and this is, you know, what might seem like a tiny insignificant interaction, actually has a really profound effect on individuals and so, if we can, you know, really being able to take that down and dissect into, well what's happening for an individual in these moments,? Right, and what's the mindset? What's the feelings? What's the reality for individuals? Provides that safe space for people to go to something that's pretty uncomfortable, right. If you've never, if you've not been told this is what it's like for somebody, if you never heard that, then you know, you might not ever start to think, you know be able to pinpoint those moments and so, that we can be a really great tool for getting people to start that journey of being an ally, being the catalyst for it.

**Interviewee:** If I can add too, I think that's one of the really great things about presenting the scenarios to the participants in that we all have our own, you know cultural identity, we all live life through our own frame of reference but it's something about, there are times when you're actually in a situation, you're living through a situation, you're not really present, you're not really cognizant of actually what's taking place but when you're on the outside, which is what we, the type of situation we create for participants, you are an observer, I think there's just a heightened awareness when you are an observer, rather than actually being the person actually living out the situation. So, I think that's what's really special about what we do, we give them an opportunity to observe something, a situation that's actually happening and then they're able to have some sort of alienation effect, if you will and they are able to observe it I think more clearly and more deeply.

**Host:** The practitioner, Kenji Yoshino provides an allyship model that has been really helpful for me, on my journey and we use it in some of our programmes and Kenji Yoshino breaks down into three buckets, he says "All along your journey to becoming a truly active ally, we start off as an ally to one, then we move to being an ally to some and then an ally to all." And what was really helpful in my understanding and discussions with participants in this space is that that model encourages you to broaden your outreach and to make sure you're not being just myopic in your allyship approach, that you're actually kind of as he says moving into that space of being an ally for all but it also doesn't punish you for where you're at on that journey because you know, what we don't want to do is for people to be so afraid, that fear factor, or thinking oh this is so far it's such a long journey to achieve being an ally to all that I just don't even want to start, right. So, like having that kind of moving up the scale, if you will to being an ally for all its been a real like helpful guide for me and there's lots of really good, you know articles on this and Ted Talks on that and I encourage people to go out



and find the journey for themselves, as helpful but that's just been one reference point for me that's always been a good guide.

**Interviewee:** Thanks for sharing that, Allen. I think what I really like about that model is this idea that it is a journey and it sort of breaks it down into manageable increments. I think that's very helpful, I think I could see how that could be useful to individuals who are just coming to this essentially, just beginning their journey, being an actionable ally, so thanks for sharing that.

**Host:** So, Shane, I'm just thinking about, you know, what's the, why do organisations really need to be focused on creating a culture that supports and encourages allyship? What's the, why does this matter?

**Interviewee:** Well, I think it matters for many reason, you know, I think that allyship in general is the connective tissue to any D&I strategy that organisations adopt but again, as I stated earlier, I think it needs to be an all hands on deck approach, you know, so that it really all comes down to belonging and we want to create environments in our organisations that, where people feel no matter what group they represent, where they actually feel that they belong, where they feel that this is actually a place for me, you know. There's nothing I think more gratifying, more life affirming than working for an organisation where you actually feel that you know there's a place for you, but you're actually meant to be there, and you have that support that allows you to do that. I, obviously there is a business case for inclusion, then again allyship is a big part of that, research shows that you know organisations that create a more inclusive culture they find that their employees are more productive, that they are happier and if folks are more productive than ultimately you know, your bottom line is being impacted, you're making more money. So, when this does not happen though, you know there are risks involved, you have potentially, you create a situation that's hostile and individuals from marginalised communities or groups are not interested in remaining an employee at that organisation. So, you're risking not only losing potential candidates for positions but also, you're risking in this day and age losing prospects because ultimately people that want to work with you, want to see that you are operating from an inclusive culture, and you know that that's part of your mission and you'll see that more and more organisations are making DEI strategies part of their mission. There's more conversations that are happening, there are initiatives in workshops being made available to their employees, they are starting to really lead with this. I can't tell you how many times I've seen organisations recently you know state that they are creating a DEI team, I mean that to me is remarkable because ten years ago, hey five years ago you would not have seen this but we may not have even been having this conversation five years ago and that's why I am so inspired by the dialogue that is happening because it tells me that people recognise that there is a need for change and they are doing whatever it is they need to do, in order to effect that change.

**Host:** Absolutely and I think you know, since even what was, what stood out for me there is from an organisational space, you can be an organisation that is practising active allyship by creating those functions that you're talking about, that are you know, consciously being aware of the talent that they're attracting and giving them a voice when you bring them into the organisation and so forth. So, you know, so there is that kind of organisational concept of allyship, as well as that individual contributor part. As we are all aware culture of an organisation is developed by its people, it's how the everyday behaviours, the interactions that you have and allyship is really, something that hadn't really thought about before and until we, in this conversation is in some way, you know I don't want to be reductive here but allyship is really just like being a good citizen to everybody and allowing them to feel like they are included, as part of the organisation and providing opportunities to people who maybe don't get advancements and so forth and so I think we are in your world, in our own world as individual contributors, or managers, or leadership can we be seeing missed opportunities, owning the fact that we can play a difference in changing it and then helping people live it,

right. I think it's just having that framework and recognition I think is a really powerful way to really advance the conversation.

**Interviewee:** I agree with that, what really resonates with me, Allen there's that, this idea that we can all be ally's, no matter where you sit in the organisation and we talk a lot in our work with our partners, that about leadership right and this idea that you can actually lead from any level, from any role within the organisation. I think the same can be said about allyship or being an ally, you can be an ally from wherever you are, wherever you are.

**Host:** Absolutely, well we could spend hours and hours and hours and many episodes talking about allyship I'm sure we could, Shane but time is against us, I'm afraid. So, that's about all the time we have left for this episode. I want to thank you so much, Shane for joining us, it's been a really engaging and thought-provoking discussion.

**Interviewee:** And Allen, I just wanna say thank you for having me, this was very inspiring.

**Host:** Well, absolutely and also want to thank the listeners for joining us on this episode, if you'd like to know more about Steps and Steps to Change make sure to visit our website, find us on LinkedIn, sign up to our newsletter, all that good stuff, that will be linked in the show notes. If you're interested in how Steps could partner with your organisation to support your needs, send us an e-mail, fill out the form online at [www.stepsdrama.com](http://www.stepsdrama.com). Is there a subject area you'd like to hear us explore, are you thinking I'd like to hear the viewpoint you have on this subject matter in the learning and development sphere? If so, reach out to us by e-mail or on our socials to let us know and as always this is not done in a vacuum, thank you so much to our production team, thank you all for your hard work we could not do this without you. I've been your host, Allen Liedkie and we look forward to you tuning into the next episode, where we'll be exploring unconscious bias. Until next time, thank you and remember you too can See it, Own it, Change it and Live it.