

Chronic Allyship by Joseph Oteng (@drjotengii)

I, as a person of color (specifically a black person) owe folx, particularly white folx, who denounce racism nothing, nor gratitude, nor praise for the doing the absolute least. Anti-racism benefits us all.

A social media status addressing ONE overt incident is not enough. I am concerned with what you do day to day with the covert insidious racism all around you. What do you do in your work, at home, and with your family/friends? When your classmates make bigoted comments, coworkers pass over qualified candidates because they won't fit "office culture," partner hates "PC culture" and the need to make media more representationally diverse, or pull your kids closer to you when you pass by people of color?

How are you interrupting racist behaviors within yourself and those around you? How are you interrogating whiteness? Where is your self-work? Do you stop when you lock your car 7 times when a person of color is nearby, regularly use people of color as memes, punchlines, or gif reactions, assume affirmative action made your colleague a diversity hire, tote the false narrative/deflection tactic of black-on-black crime, ignore health disparities from environment racism and inaccessibility, or have situational sympathy for jailing people of color for minor drug offenses but are all for rehab efforts to stop the opioid epidemic?

How do you interpersonally combat racism and systematically work to dismantle white supremacy? How do you share space, time and opportunity with people of color? Do you read think-pieces, view documentaries, and process through definitions on your own time? Do you expect people of color to teach you about themselves/their existences, and/or how to not do anti-racist work? Do you require people of color to prove they are human, deserving of rights, worthy of life over and over again?

Do you take critique, challenge, or checks to complacency? Do you accept responsibility AND genuinely apologize for your microaggressions? Do you do better afterwards or continue to do the same things? Are you aware of the ways you contribute to racial battle fatigue?

Do you tone police, ask people of color to lower the volume of their suffering, or regularly tune out of conversations around race/racism because you think you're not implicated? Do you abide by respectability politics as a prerequisite for your care? Do you call for compliance that reifies white supremacy and patriarchy? Do you expect assimilation? Do you whitewash, undermine, or invalidate the experiences of people of color?

Is your activism for show, used for positionality, or expectant of recognition? Do you rate how "woke" you are or use your knowledge of social justice to shame others? Do you engage other white folx or only talk about race with people of color?

Do you center yourself in your anti-racist work? Do you lack a socio-political intersectional context? Do you vulnerably share your OWN stories of prejudice or do you rely on non-consensually repeating the traumas of people of color to illustrate a cause? Do you expect people of color to do the emotional labor without sacrificing your own emotional energy? Do you co-opt conversations to a marginalized identity space you're more comfortable with and/or "but what about me" pivot?

Do you know the tangible ways you benefit from white supremacy? Do you conflate classism to deject dialogue around race? Are you more concerned with not being called a racist than you are eradicating actual racism?

Do you retreat into the comfort, safety, and solace of privilege? Do you go about your days unphased, unmoved, or oblivious to the plight of people of color? Do you move in an out of conversations around race as you please? Are you tired of "identity politics" - hate, divide, tension, negativity etc.? Are you tired people losing their lives, being mistreated, and existing as subhuman?

Do you use your microphone to preach to a choir of "well-meaning" or "harmless" peoples? Do you take up space, speak over people of color, or whitesplain things they have just said/take credit for them? Do you amplify the voices of people of color and/or pass the mic?

Do you get stuck in white guilt, spill white tears, or fulfill the white savior complex? Do you expect the people of color in your life to console you, remind you that you're a good person, or that anything you do is enough? Do you check on the people of color you have in your life? Do you support them in their self-care? Do you tell them that you care about them, see them, or love them?

Are you an unconditional activist or is your allyship situational/relational? Do you value, matter, and celebrate the humanity of people of color? Is there unconditional love for the BIPOC in your life? Have you expressed that? Have you proven that, consistently?

Does this make you uncomfortable, mad, or shut down? Does this make you think? Did you read this in the key of "angry black man"? Did you skip over this because it was too long?