

The Complications of Listening

All activists want what they feel is better for society. A common goal, but occasionally different methods. Becoming socially aware is a difficult task. It requires far more than educating oneself on the ins and outs of social justice. It is one thing to be educated on the struggles of trans, black, disabled, (etc.) people; but it is another to become versed in how they feel.

Let me explain myself, I am not saying that a white person has to understand what it is like to be a black person living in the United States, simply because this will never happen. A white person will never understand the struggles of what it is like to be African American, just like a cisgender person will never understand what it is like to be a transgender person. What we can do, is listen.

A good activist advocates for others and stands up for them both socially and politically; a great activist gives others a platform to speak, takes a step back, and listens.

Through my experience, I find that many activists do an excellent job of making their voices heard, and giving the 'system' a slap in the face. While this is incredibly important, it disregards a key aspect of advocacy; listening to others, and inviting them to the table.

As an example, let's say that you are fighting for period products to be more accessible in schools. You may strategically work alongside parents or teachers who are open to your ideas, but you will refrain from speaking directly to the administration, who disregard your opinions. Activists have strategized and learned how to make their point clear to their allies. There is no denying this! But what many activists have forgotten as an option is inviting other people to the table. I am speaking of all of the people who are not usually talked to; who no one asks questions about or of!

Let's continue to use the example of fighting for period products to be more accessible in schools. Here, I could invite people who are socioeconomically underrepresented, transgender people, culturally and ethnically diverse people to support my argument. These personal accounts are often more powerful to not only the opposing sides, but to society. By allowing other people to tell you what they want, you are making activism all the more powerful.

Like most ideas, in theory, this idea is simple; however, it is far easier said than done. I will surely not stand here and act like I am the all-knowing person. There have been a lot of times where I did not listen to other people, and I greatly regret those interactions. I have learned from those mistakes, and try my very hardest to avoid them.

If there is something that I want you to walk away with today, it is to listen. Speaking can be tiring, to you, and the people who never get an opportunity to do so. Invite the underrepresented to the table and serve as an example by listening carefully.