

## Seven Ways to Fight Bias in Your Everyday Life



Foster diversity and inclusion and build a better world by putting your beliefs into practice.

BY DOLLY CHUGH | AUGUST 3, 2021

When Tamir Rice, a young boy not much older than my own children, was shot by police and killed while playing with a toy gun, I finally felt like I had to get involved in the Black Lives Matter movement. I had never identified as a protester and had never been to a protest, but I knew it was time to go from just watching on social media to actually showing up.



I rallied together my husband and some friends for a Black Lives Matter protest in New York City. We didn't know where it was headed, so we followed this incredibly well-organized group of 100 young people and ended up at the Toys"R"Us that used to be in Times Square, a huge flagship store full of tourists.

We took the escalators up to the top floor, because that's where the toy gun section was. And there we staged a die-in. All 100 of us lay on the ground as if we had been shot, with holiday music playing through the sound system.

I remember feeling terrified. There was nothing to be terrified of, in the sense that this protest was incredibly peaceful, and yet still I felt like I wasn't cut out for this. It was scary. Was there no other way to be involved, to support the work, I wondered?

I wrote my book *The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias* for semi-bold people like me, who want guidance on the path toward doing their part and not being passive. For people who already believe in diversity and inclusion, who know that bias exists in the world and even in themselves, who want to deepen their knowledge and figure out what to do about it.

Just believing in egalitarian and anti-racist values or posting about them on social media, and not acting on them, does nothing other than reinforce the status quo. Based on psychology research, dozens of interviews I did for *The Person You Mean to Be*, and my own experience, here are some tips for you as you continue your journey from believing in egalitarianism and anti-racism to building a better world.

### 1. Aim to be good-ish, rather than good

Research on moral identity finds that it's highly important for many of us to be seen as a good person and to feel like a good person. In fact, we care so much about defending that identity that we'll engage in incredibly nimble mental gymnastics to find a way to see ourselves as good when we're challenged.

That means our good-person identity can actually be a barrier to the goal of learning and improving. Because of the unconscious prejudices we hold, we often act in ways that don't fit with our good-person identity. But when we're confronted with that, we close down, because we have to defend our identity—rather than opening up to the possibility for a moment of learning.

What I propose is that we try to be *good-ish*, rather than good. This largely builds on research by Carol Dweck and her colleagues on the fixed mindset vs. the growth mindset. When you have a fixed mindset, you believe there is nothing to learn and no way to grow; in the case of goodness, you're either good or you're not. But with a growth mindset, you see yourself as a work in progress. You can always get better, no matter where you started. When we are in a growth mindset, we show more brain activity when a mistake is pointed out to us; with a fixed mindset, there is less brain activity; we pull away.

As good-ish people, we will be more open to learning when our biases come up. Being good-ish is not a lower standard than being good; it's actually a higher standard, because we're accountable and growing all the time.

## 2. Follow the “10% More Rule”

Last summer, I (like many) grew very fearful that after a month or so, people would lose interest in anti-racism, thinking the work was done. To combat that, I suggested the 10% More Rule, which means something different depending on where you are in your journey.

If you're new to an issue like racism, sexism, or ableism—if you didn't think it was a problem for you, you thought it was someone else's problem, or you thought the problem was already solved—then be *10% more mortified*. You're seeing things you didn't see before in yourself or the world around you, and you're in danger of either shutting down or burning out with a brief burst of interest. Instead, being 10% more mortified is sustainable.

If you're someone who's been aware of these issues—maybe you share on social media or you've donated or volunteered—be *10% more terrified*. In other words, maybe it's time to take a little more risk: to ask that question, share that learning that feels vulnerable, or show up at that affinity group meeting.

If you're exhausted—if you're on the front lines of doing the work, or your identity makes it unavoidable for you to deal with these issues every day—maybe you can be *10% more “satisfied.”* Not satisfied that the work is done, but satisfied that you don't have to play every minute of the game. You can breathe and let others do some of the work, and you can come back when you're ready.

I picked 10% because goal setting researchers tell us we need attainable but challenging goals, and doing 10% more fits that criteria. Many opportunities slip by to make things better around us and within us, but let's do 10% more than we did before.

## 3. Learn how to say people's names

I tell a story in *The Person You Mean to Be* about two collaborators who were working together, Sarah Weeks and Gita Varadarajan. Sarah did not know how to say Gita's multi-syllable South Indian last name, and would avoid saying her last name when making introductions. As a teacher, when I don't know how to say a student's name, I have sometimes hesitated to call on them—and, of course, the names I don't know tend to be from backgrounds that are different from my own.

---

### DEAR GOOD PEOPLE

Want to keep this learning going? Check out Dear Good People—Dolly Chugh's free, monthly newsletter on how to be the inclusive person you mean to be. It is bite-sized, evidence-based, and action-oriented. Check out past issues and sign up at [dollychugh.com/newsletter](https://dollychugh.com/newsletter).

---

Now I realize that there are a lot of names we don't say because we just haven't tried, or we haven't put in the minute to Google how to say them, where many resources are available.

My tip is to take five people whose names you don't know how to say—they could be neighbors, community members, coworkers, even family members—and ask them. If you're uncomfortable asking them, spend a little time on the internet and learn how to say their names. Don't nickname them when they haven't asked to be nicknamed, don't shorten their names, don't just point at them; say their real names. If we can learn how to say “supercalifragilisticexpialidocious” and the names on “Game of Thrones,” we can make this small yet meaningful effort.

## 4. Audit your media consumption

I was rearranging some of my bookshelves a while ago, organizing the books by type. I put together a memoir section and was proudly looking at all these memoirs I had read, until I realized there were almost no women authors on that shelf.

How did that happen, that I was only reading memoirs by men? There are probably more published about and by men, but there are also plenty I could read by women. So in the last year, I've made a conscious choice to change that, and I've discovered many wonderful books I wouldn't have otherwise.

You too can take stock of your media consumption, whether it's podcasts, books, movies, TV shows, or social media. Pick a

category and write down the last 10 you consumed, and look at how much similarity there is among the voices that are centered, whether it's the creator's voice or the characters' voices. How similar are those voices to your own experience and background? How similar are the voices to each other?

Then, see if there's a way to expand what experiences you are being exposed to. With a little awareness, we can break out of the tendency that we have to hear the same voices.

## 5. Run better meetings

Tony Prophet of Salesforce.com convinced me that at any company, nonprofit, school, or religious organization, whatever is happening in meetings is just a microcosm of what's happening in the organization. Whoever is being talked over, not credited for their work, or judged as overly emotional or angry in a meeting is also being disadvantaged in the larger organization.

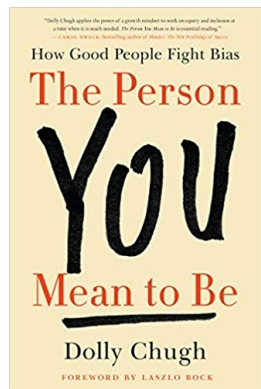
To foster diversity and inclusion, we need to do things that make for better information exchange in meetings: balancing air time, ensuring multiple perspectives are brought upon issues, being fair in how we treat and credit people.

It could start with just keeping a tally of who's talking and how much they're talking; some virtual platforms actually track this for you. You can also watch nonverbal signals a little more and be an active ally when you notice that someone has been spoken over, undercredited, misunderstood, dismissed, or ignored. Ideally, try to address the issue in the meeting; remember the 10% More Rule.

Whether we're running the meeting or just participating in the meeting, we can be a little more active. For example, if someone was interrupted, you can circle back and ask them to finish what they were saying. Or if someone seems to be taking credit for someone else's idea, you can thank them for re-sharing that other person's insight.

## 6. Use your privilege for influence

Researchers are studying what happens when we "call out" a racist or sexist comment. For example, when a white person tells a racist joke, what happens when a white person or a Black person says, "That's not cool"?



*The Person You Mean to Be: How Good People Fight Bias* (HarperBusiness, 2018, 320 pages).

According to the research, when a Black person calls it out, they're more likely to be viewed as rude and whining. When the white person does, they're more likely to be persuasive. This illustrates that when you have the privilege, you also have the influence. A similar pattern has been found in research examining hiring and promotion.

You might not think it's your place to say something, but in fact it's often just the opposite. Not that you should speak over people or instead of people who are directly affected. But in a moment when the alternative is silence, there's absolutely an opportunity to use your privilege for good.

The word "privilege" makes people feel uncomfortable and ashamed, but we're missing the opportunity that exists in privilege to make a positive impact. So many of us are walking around in this cone of shame instead of being grateful we figured out

where our privilege is, because that means we figured out where our influence could be.

## 7. Build a community to grow together

In my book, I made a conscious choice to share some of my own mishaps. What I was trying to do is what teachers and students often do for each other: make their learning visible and show their work. This breaks us out of the internal shame spiral, and it also makes it possible for us to learn from each other.

I think the way we build communities is by talking about what we're learning. I don't think it's as effective to preach at others as it is to tell stories about our mistakes, like the time I used the word "gypped" in class and a student informed me about its problematic racial history.

So let's keep telling each other about our mistakes. And then maybe we'll start larger conversations; if I talk about my use of the word "gypped," maybe you can tell me about other words you've learned about, and we can all be more inclusive.

If we're willing to make ourselves vulnerable to others, whether it's our roommates, family members, or colleagues, they will do the same. And then boom—we've got a community.

All of these tips can help us grow from our own mistakes, but the other piece of the puzzle is how our society can grow from the mistakes of the past. Many of us are now realizing that we didn't learn a full, true account of our country's history, whether it's Confederate statues or the land that we've stolen from Native Americans. Research suggests that when we know our true history, we will be better able to see the problems and solutions of the present. Unlearning whitewashed history requires us to navigate difficult emotions like shame, guilt, and grief. My next book is a psychologist's guidebook to doing this kind of intellectual and emotional personal work, so that we can learn and grow in our larger communities.

*This essay was adapted by Greater Good editor Kira M. Newman based on a talk that is part of the Positive Links Speaker Series by the University of Michigan's Center for Positive Organizations. The Center is dedicated to building a better world by pioneering the science of thriving organizations.*



---

Get the science of a meaningful workplace delivered to your inbox.

Email Address

Sign Up

---

## About the Author



**Dolly Chugh**

**Dolly Chugh, Ph.D.**, is the Jacob B. Melnick Term Professor at the NYU Stern School of Business. As a social psychologist, her research focuses on the "psychology of good people" and has been published in a number of high-impact academic journals.

---