

Guide to Being a Good Comrade

Comradely Behavior at Meetings

Progressive Stack

- We try to prioritize who should speak based on three elements: the order in which they've indicated something to say (e.g. by raising a hand), how much they've already spoken during the meeting, and their marginalized status. We want to make sure all voices are heard, especially those which are typically ignored due to marginalization.
- Ensure that comrades of color, women and other people who aren't men, LGBTQ+ comrades, disabled comrades, and otherwise marginalized comrades have room to speak and floor time to voice concerns. If they voice concerns related to their marginalization, be responsible about your reaction; do not become defensive or fall back on the fragility that can come with privilege.

One person at a time

- One person should be allowed to speak at a time, and to speak until they are finished with their thought.
- Do your best to not interrupt, to not speak at the same time as somebody else, and to pay attention whenever somebody is speaking. Typical rules of politeness apply.

Notetaking

- One way you can contribute during meetings is by taking notes and sharing them after the meeting. There should be one notetaker at every meeting.

Offering Labor and taking on Work

- Taking on projects, work, and other labor is a great way to contribute as a DSA member. It is best for you to take on an amount of work you feel comfortable taking on without becoming burnt out or being unable to complete.
- This balance can be difficult to get a hang of, especially at first. Ultimately the work you take on should be informed by your interest and personal capacity to commit, even when it feels like other comrades are taking on more work or less work than you are.

Comradely Behavior within a Big Tent organization

- Don't be sectarian!
- Exact party, label, preferred philosopher, etc are not nearly as important as shared broader goals of improving equality and dismantling capitalism
- Disagreements should be about issues and stances, not ML vs Anarchist vs Trotskyist etc

Comradely Behavior - Allyship

- Marginalized people may have trouble asserting boundaries. Consent is not always as simple as a yes or no question.
- Meetings should begin with introductions including names and pronouns
 - Exception being if everybody at the meeting are well-acquainted, this can be dropped, but should be the standard by default
- Use the same inclusive language even when marginalized comrades aren't present
 - Use correct pronouns, make it a priority
 - Don't use othering or bigoted language
- Don't ask invasive questions...
 - About people's bodies

- About why they don't drink/otherwise imbibe a substance
- About something a comrade tells you is a trigger or asks you to not discuss in front of them

Use judgement and caution when engaging with your Comrades about things that are private and/or potentially traumatic

Being a Comrade to LGBTQIA+ people

- Don't out people!
 - Don't refer to somebody's sexuality/orientation or trans status if they haven't already come out themselves to those present
 - If you aren't sure, assume they are not out. If you can, privately check with the person if it's okay to reference their orientation or gender

Being a Comrade to Women

- Don't give a Comrade a compliment you wouldn't give to your mother
- Use restraint with jokes that reference sex, stay away from jokes about rape and assault

Being a Comrade to Disabled people

- Don't interact with service dogs
 - Unless your Comrade has freely offered
- Stand normally (don't crouch) when speaking to Comrades in wheelchairs

Comradely Behavior When You Make Mistakes

Apologies

A worthwhile apology includes an unambiguous admission of guilt. Ideally it should include ways you will attempt to rectify the situation and a commitment to not messing up again, but the real key thing is taking responsibility. This means absolutely no “I’m sorry you were offended” type faux-apologies that shift responsibility. Explaining yourself is a tricky thing, because while it may be pertinent information, it can’t override the primary purpose of an apology - the acceptance of responsibility.

Admitting to making a mistake doesn’t mean admitting you are a “bad person.” You’re admitting to something you said or did and acknowledging that harm was caused, not making a judgment on your fundamental character.

Changed Behavior

The best apology is changed behavior. Even if your apologies are solid, they are meaningless if you don’t take steps to actually prevent the problem from happening again.

What if I don’t think I did anything wrong?

Sometimes you are made out to be the bad guy unfairly. Always keep in mind that you are biased toward seeing yourself as right all the time, and that sometimes the problematic person *is you*. Sometimes these things don’t have a clear-cut right answer.

A few pieces of guidance:

- Google is your friend! Go read things written by marginalized people regarding the issue at hand. Read things you disagree with. Read more, and then read some more. Your marginalized comrade is not automatically right, but always deserves the benefit of the doubt! You don’t know what you don’t know, but your own intellectual and social development is your own responsibility.
- If somebody feels harmed and thinks you are responsible, don’t go to that person for reassurance. If they were legitimately harmed, you’re asking them to take on more responsibility on top of that harm. If they are a manipulator or abuser, they will take the opportunity to make you feel guilty on purpose.

- Going to another member of a marginalized group to ask for their opinion means asking them to choose between your feelings and their group solidarity. It's not up to marginalized people to review your versions of an event and declare them "problematic" or not.
- Going to another member of a privileged group that you belong to means getting input from somebody who is biased by the same privilege that you are.