



## Countering Systemic Racism - Being an Advocate

*“Who, me? Yes, you.”*

### Why Advocacy?

**Advocacy is the process that is essential for systemic change.** It is essential for designing the necessary laws and policies and for getting them enacted and implemented. It is also essential for getting the right decisions made for organizations – from strategy and targeted outcomes to a range of organization design elements (from membership, roles, and relationships, to processes and style).

*Advocacy is the act of supporting, defending or arguing for a specific cause.  
The purpose of advocacy is to bring about change.*

Being an advocate is a critical role for individuals. It is critical not only for being the voice of certain groups of people, but it is also critical for educating decision-makers and then supporting them. Engaged advocates are critical for the decision-makers because the decision-makers need credible input as well as support to make and implement the right decisions – and then be supported after the decisions..

### It's About Action

Advocacy can take a surprising number of forms. It can range from educating people in general or specific decision-makers or influencers to working to get specific policies or laws or procedures in place. Advocacy can be about helping an individual, advancing a cause or bringing about systemic change.

The common thread is that advocacy is about action.

### Six Key Points About Advocacy

1. Advocacy is the key for most of the domains on which countering racism is focused: closing the racial wealth gap, healthcare, education, criminal justice, citizenship, etc.

2. Individuals are the key to advocacy – in lots of roles – large and small
3. Individuals can take direct actions, such as communicating with decision makers and protesting/supporting specific issues
4. Individuals can have an even greater impact by strengthening groups and organizations through membership, money, a wide range of capabilities, recruiting others/networking, etc.
5. Advocacy can be local, state and/or national
6. Advocacy can be organizational and/or governmental

## **The Big Barrier**

**The big barrier is simply that most of us don't see ourselves as advocates.**

“Advocates” seem like people who are trained and experienced and have a certain personality. There can be other barriers, but this is the big one to get past. In reality, advocacy is a process and lots of roles are required for success. Playing any of those roles is advocacy.

This is an introduction to the arena of advocacy and an effort to make it easier for individuals to get engaged in playing effective roles in the advocacy process. The key is to just get started, explore, and see where it takes you.

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**“THOU SHALT NOT BE A  
VICTIM, THOU SHALT  
NOT BE A  
PERPETRATOR, BUT,  
ABOVE ALL, THOU  
SHALT NOT BE A  
BYSTANDER.” —  
YEHUDA BAUER**

## #1

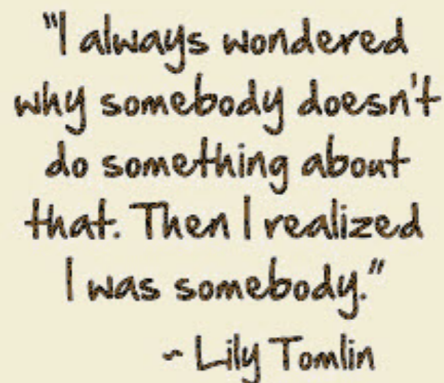
### How Do I Start

*"The secret of getting ahead is getting started."*

Mark Twain

**It's fine to start small. Just start.** There is no specific magic path that you have to discover. Just start down the path.

1. **Choose Your Focus.** Decide where you want to make a difference – one or more issues
2. **Gain Basic Knowledge.** Research the topic(s) so that you feel some confidence in engaging, but don't over-prepare because that can delay your engagement
3. **Be Conscious About What You are Bringing.** Reflect on what characteristics, knowledge, or skills you are bringing to the groups that you might join. This is not to justify your inclusion, but to give you a chance to be conscious and intentional in what you bring. You can also deepen current capabilities and develop new ones as you gain experience.
4. **Connect.** Explore what groups already exist in the area of interest and choose which to join. Or start a formal or informal group if no relevant groups exist. Being clear about what you are bringing to the effort is key to effectively connecting because it helps others see where you might fit.
5. **Act with Confidence.** You don't have to be an expert or bring a dozen skills to a group to be a valuable member. When groups are powerful it's because they have integrated the various skills, knowledge bases, and characteristics of their members. Get started now, bring what you've got and remember that your capabilities will probably grow rapidly if you commit.
6. **Learn from Experience and Constantly Grow.** This is just a good stance to take in life and being part of the advocacy process offers a lot of opportunities to grow both personally and as a contributor.



"I always wondered why somebody doesn't do something about that. Then I realized I was somebody."  
- Lily Tomlin

## #2

### What is “Advocacy”

*Advocacy is the act of supporting, defending or arguing for a specific cause.  
The purpose of advocacy is to bring about change.*

### Beyond Lobbying

Advocacy may be political (like lobbying) to get laws or policies established or change - but it can also be focused on educating the public, standing up for an individual or group, bringing about change within organizations of various types, or developing capabilities within a community.

### Advocacy is Often Complex & Difficult

Influencing policy – whether governmental or organizational – can be complex and difficult. That is partly the result of the inherent complexity of the issues, but it is also the result of the complexity and difficulty of working within governmental and organizational hierarchies and the amount of competition for time, attention, and resources. And, it is rarely a linear process. It usually has lots of twists and turns with progress and setbacks and requires a lot of perseverance and resilience.

That can naturally be intimidating for individuals and smaller groups, particularly those lacking experience and resources. But countering systemic racism will require a large number of individuals and smaller groups to be active and coordinated around issues as much as possible or sufficient policy changes will not be developed, let alone implemented.

The key for individuals is to engage in areas of interest and bring the skills, characteristics, and knowledge that they currently have – and commit to whatever skill, characteristic or knowledge development they think will increase their confidence and impact. What is important is to get in the game, contribute and persevere – because it takes a lot of people and we have to “hold the course” because it’s often a long game.

## #3

### Who is Involved in Advocacy?

*It takes lots of diverse individuals – usually in groups and networks – and the policy makers*

### Individuals

It all starts with individuals. Lots of individuals that come in lots of forms. There is a large number of settings in which to be an advocate and an extraordinary variety of groups involved in those settings. The actions that help individuals be successful include:

1. Commit to an issue and connect with others working on that issue.
2. Bring the talents/resources/connections you currently have.
3. Build new ones to be more effective – target specific knowledge, skills, characteristics, relationships and learn from the experience – and learn with others.
4. Persevere over time and be resilient.
5. Be a good group member and an active (not passive) follower. If you are in a leadership role, be an increasingly good collaborative leader.

### **Effective Advocacy Groups and Networks**

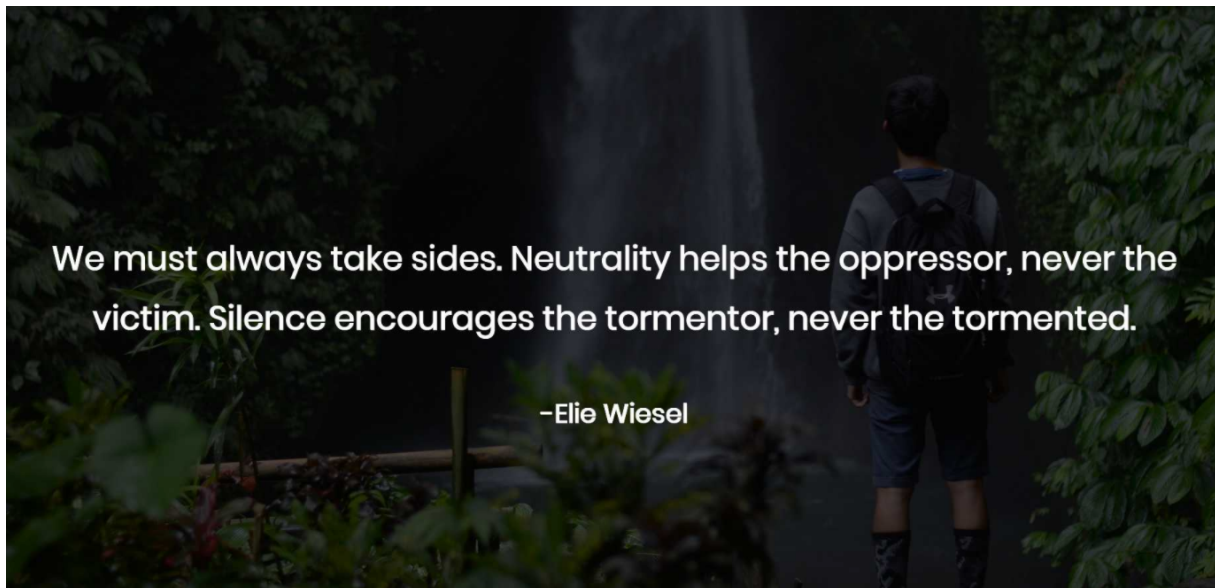
The life of a group or network needs to be a priority issue. Effective groups and networks are consciously developed and maintained. That can include, but not be limited, by the following.

1. Ensure ongoing committed group and network development – time and effort devoted.
2. Form/deepen coalitions/relationships – essential for big complex issues.
3. Develop group members relevant capabilities.
4. Ensure an effective process(s) for successful advocacy and the supporting capabilities.
5. Develop key roles – for example policy entrepreneur (starting efforts), policy champion (carrying efforts forward), shared leadership roles, researchers, analysts, roles in various forms of communications, policy development roles, networkers, etc.

### **Policy Makers (elected and appointed – governmental & organizational)**

Policy makers are not just targets of advocacy efforts. The policy makers themselves can be involved in the advocacy process and can be effective or ineffective in an area based on how they approach it. To be successful they need to:

1. Commit/Invest in advocacy efforts that are priorities – time, attention, energy, possibly political capital.
2. Make it clear to advocates what works with them – approach, process, do's and don'ts, etc. It's a "help me help you" approach for high value initiatives.
3. Relate – to other policy makers, advocates, experts, etc.
4. Build the coalition/support to make happen what's important – connect advocates, guide advocates, support the development of public will, etc.
5. Drive the relevant decision-making, from policies and laws to resources and implementation support.



#### #4

### **What is the Advocacy Process?**

*Advocacy is not an event. It is a process that drives change.*

There is no magic recipe for effective advocacy, mostly because there is so much variation in the challenge from issue to issue or setting to setting. There are, however, some basics that form a good foundation.

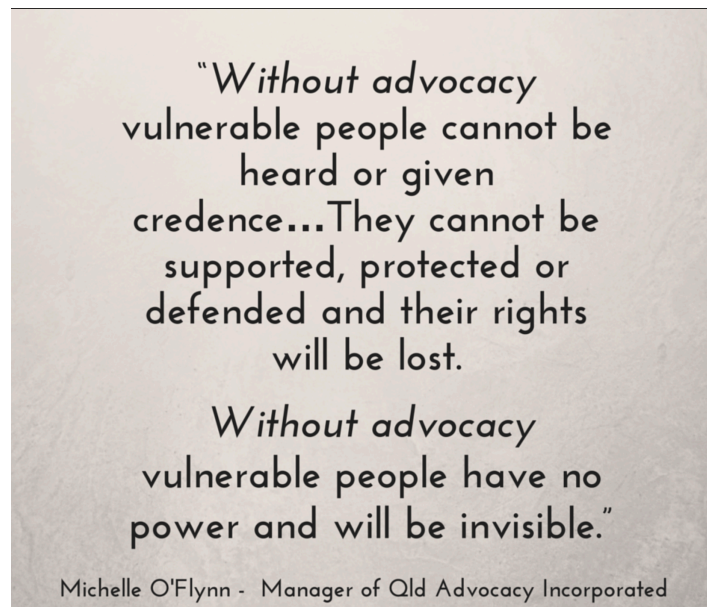
Policy, laws, and how they are implemented will drive change, so the real question will be to stay with the current reality or leave that world and commit to a new reality. The difficulty of such journeys stacks the deck against new policies, laws, and effective implementation, so the advocacy effort must be up to that level of challenge.

### **Make the “Business Case” for Why the Change is Necessary**

What is precipitating the desire for the policy/change? Why consider changing? What justifies taking the risks and making the effort and sacrifice to leave the known world of current reality? What is the nature of “current reality”? What might happen if we are successful and what might happen if we are not?

1. Gather the intelligence and create a clear picture of current reality and why it is not acceptable. This is a picture of current reality and the natural consequences of not changing.
2. Include “head and heart” – the intellectual case and the emotional/value case.
3. Make it understandable and compelling – the big picture supported with details where required

4. Include the consequences of the current reality as well as the projected consequences if change is not implemented



### **Create a Clear, Specific and Compelling Vision of the Desired State**

What reality might the proposed policy or law create? What is worth the risks and effort required in change?

1. Clearly propose the desired policy, law, or form of implementation - and how they will drive toward the envisioned desired state.
2. Include “head and heart” – the intellectual picture and the emotional/value picture
3. Include interim phases and goals were necessary for large, complex, or tough changes.
4. Lay out the ROI – the return that can be expected for making the required investment (time, money, effort, political capital, etc.).
5. Indicate the resources/support that can be brought to bear.

### **Design Strategies for Achieving the Vision**

Lay out sets of actions that can be taken – decreasing the intimidation of the unknown and building confidence.

1. Determine the main streams of activity that will be needed to achieve the vision.
2. Create a clear action plan with goals, tactics, timing, roles, and relationships.
3. Highlight the resources of various kinds that can be brought to bear to support implementation.
4. Highlight how the decision-makers can be supported for having made the effort and taking the risk to make the necessary decisions.
5. Design a system of accountability and rapid learning to “hold the course.”

## **Prepare the Ground – Build a Critical Mass of Support**

Make it as easy as possible to say “yes.” Don’t rely on “it being the right thing to do.”

Success in battle is often won in preparation and choosing the battlefield and timing.

1. Understand the interests of all key stakeholders, the pressures and risks they face, and how they work.
2. Build the public will behind the initiative.
3. Create collaborative relationships/partnerships necessary.
4. Know the barriers and pitfalls and have solutions ready.
5. Anticipate the risk and fear factors of various stakeholders and diminish them as much as possible.
6. Project the impact of the expected changes driven by the policies and have strategies in place to minimize negative impacts.

## **Invest in Relationships**

Building and maintaining relationships is at the heart of advocacy. Healthy relationships support trust and credibility, which is essential. They can determine the quality of communications and decision-making. There are a number of key relationships to build and maintain. For example, relationships with:

1. Policy makers
2. Policy staff
3. Allies
4. Opponents
5. Experts
6. Communities
7. Potential group members
8. The media
9. Funders

## **Attend to the “Nuts and Bolts” (Behind the Scenes)**

The sections above outline the big foundation blocks of advocacy, but behind the scenes there are dozens of tasks that need to be done to be successful. And individuals build those foundation blocks by doing lots of “nuts and bolts” tasks.

They range from researching, editing, and lots of logistical tasks to building and maintaining websites, graphic design, managing contacts, supporting people, keeping energy up, and a wide range of administrative tasks. They can also include being present at protests and advocacy rallies, using social networks, and individually contacting policy makers.



Leaders of advocacy efforts need people doing all of those tasks – and many more. “You can’t play the game if you don’t have the players.” And it takes a lot of players to play the tough games.

Don't wait until everything is just right. It will never be perfect. There will always be challenges, obstacles and less than perfect conditions. So what. Get started now. With each step you take, you will grow stronger and stronger, more and more skilled, more and more self-confident and more and more successful.

(Mark Victor Hansen)

## #5

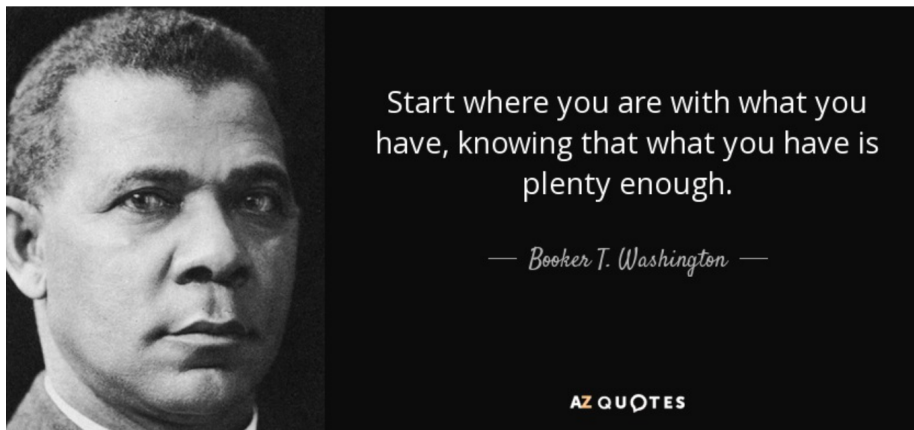
### **Skills, Characteristics & Knowledge that Make a Difference**

*You don't need all the skills, characteristics, and knowledge. Start with what you have and add to them on the path.*

Advocacy is often a difficult and complex process and it requires a wide range of skills, characteristics, and knowledge. No one embodies all of the skills, characteristics and knowledge required, so successful advocacy relies on groups finding that capability within their membership and bringing it to bear in a coordinated fashion.

Individuals need to find their value-add and groups need to help them do so and then combine it with others. The initial value-add of people can grow both rapidly and extensively with the right support.

The best way to review the following lists is to be surprised at how many of the qualities you can bring to advocacy vs. focusing on what's missing. No one brings everything. No one.



## **Skills**

There is a wide array of skills that combine for effective advocacy and their importance varies by issue. These are examples and no one brings all of these skills. The idea is to have a group that has as many of these skills within it as possible and know how to deploy them effectively. For each individual it's a matter of identifying the skills that they want to bring to the group.

1. Listening
2. Written communication
3. Spoken communication
4. Research
5. Analysis
6. Negotiations (particularly interest-based negotiations)
7. Conflict resolution
8. Relationship skills
9. Operations analysis
10. Systems mapping
11. Emotional support
12. Change leadership
13. Educating
14. Social media skills
15. Admin support (many possibilities)
16. Persuasion
17. Sales
18. Fund raising
19. Management skills (wide range)
20. Problem solving
21. Group development
22. Board performance
23. Information technology
24. Effective meetings
25. Networking
26. Collaboration
27. Decision-making

## **Characteristics**

Not everyone needs to have all these characteristics. The list is to be used as a way to identify the characteristics that you have that can contribute to the advocacy process. Most of them are characteristics that support a healthy life.

1. Perseverance
2. Resilience
3. Empathy

4. Passion
5. Optimism
6. Risk-taking
7. Flexibility
8. Likability
9. Discipline
10. Integrity
11. Self-awareness
12. Service orientation
13. Honesty
14. Credibility
15. Sense of humor

## **Knowledge**

There are several general types of knowledge that are necessary for success. There is knowledge behind all of the skills that can be brought to advocacy and there is knowledge specific to the advocacy process. It helps to have topic experts, but you don't need to have deep expertise on a topic to make a difference in the advocacy process. For example:

1. Understanding the governmental or organizational processes for policy development and legislation and the pressures in play. How do things get done? What works and what doesn't? What factors or pressures are in play?
2. The resources available to make the case for the policy and to support the changes that the policy will drive.
3. Knowledge of the advocacy process itself. What is the game we are playing and how do we play it?
4. Understanding the interests and pressure on policy makers. What is their world and experience like and how can we enter it effectively?
5. Knowledge of the influencers. Who can influence the outcomes? How do we engage and collaborate with them?
6. Understanding adversaries. What are their interests, strengths, weaknesses, styles and strategies?
7. Understanding how groups work
8. Understanding the process of change - individual, group, or systemic.

**Note.** If you bring some of the skills and characteristics noted in the sections above, you can contribute to the advocacy process – you can make a difference. Many of the knowledge types noted in this section are specific to the advocacy process and can be learned rapidly once engaged. The more of these types of knowledge you gain the more impact you can have, but it's best to develop them once you are in the game vs. preparing on the sideline. Bring what you have and then learn on the path.



## So, Begin Now

**#1 Choose Your Focus.** Decide where you want to make a difference – one or more issues.

**#2 Gain Basic Knowledge.** Research the topic(s) so that you feel some confidence in engaging, but don't over-prepare because that can delay your engagement.

**#3 Be Conscious About What You are Bringing.** Reflect on what skills, characteristics, or knowledge, you are bringing to the groups that you might join. This is not to justify your inclusion, but to give you a chance to be conscious and intentional about what you bring. You can also deepen current capabilities and develop new ones as you gain experience.

**#4 Connect.** Explore what groups already exist in your area of interest and choose which to join. If you can present the skills, characteristics and knowledge identified in #3 it helps the groups figure out how to deploy you. Or start a formal or informal group if no relevant groups exist.

**#5 Act with Confidence.** You don't have to be an expert or bring a dozen skills to a group to be a valuable member. When groups are powerful it's because they have integrated the various skills, knowledge bases and characteristics of their members. Get started now, bring what you've got and remember that your capabilities will probably grow rapidly if you commit.