



VAAHINI CONNECT PODCAST|SEASON 2| EPISODE 2 YOU'VE ADDED YOUR PRONOUNS TO YOUR PROFILE. CONGRATULATIONS, YOU'RE JUST BEGINNING AS AN ALLY! AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to the Accenture Vaahini Connect podcast. In Season Two, 'Meet the luminaries', we bring to you the unique stories of women luminaries who share how we can all play a role in furthering big goals that impact societies.

Whether you are a salaried employee, an entrepreneur, a student, or just someone looking for a way to contribute to society, in each episode, we hope to bring to you inspiring stories and effective ways on how each one of us in our powers can make this world a better place for all.

I'm Savitha Nanjappa, Success Coach, Founder of Success with Savitha and your Podcast Host.

In this episode, we meet Tanvi Nair, an out and proud trans woman and a vocal LGBTQ+ Advocate. A data analytics professional, TEDx speaker and DE&I Consultant, Tanvi leads 'The Ally Nation' project which provides free gender sensitization training to build a strong and effective ally network.

Let's hear from Tanvi on how incremental, everyday actions can help people with different identities feel comfortable and build a strong and effective ally network at work.

Hi, and welcome to the show. Thank you so much for making the time to be here with us today to talk to us about allyship. My first



question for you, Tanvi, what is the best way for an ally to express genuine curiosity and compassion about the lives and work of LGBTQ+ colleagues? How can people at work be sensitized to remain sensitive and respectful in expressing this curiosity?

Whenever we discuss this, what happens mostly, is that curiosity kind of becomes intrusive at times. And we sometimes forget the boundaries. So, if you want to be a better ally, or a good ally, the first thing, and this was the same thing that was taught to us at school—do your homework first. Right? There are tons of resources online, you can read about so much, there's so much video content, reels, movies, and there are shows. Apart from that there is so much online content that you can read. So do your homework first. Then, if you do, because that will give you a better insight. And that will also teach you about the boundaries, that will tell you about the boundaries. You'll exactly know when you're overstepping, and that we don't end up becoming intrusive. That is the first step of becoming a better ally, educating yourself. Because the community per se, does not have the onus of educating anyone. Right? It's not their responsibility, there are a lot of resources, content out there; educating yourself, that will be the first step. And then, that will teach you when to not overstep and when to not be intrusive.

Okay. That's a great point on boundaries. And it's something that I think all of us struggle with, at some point. What are some examples of microaggressions in the workplace that have been normalized or considered normal? And what can allies do to change or impact this?

There are a lot of them. The first thing and the most neglected thing - And I keep saying this, even in my sessions - is the use of the word "guys". We step into the meeting and say, "Hey, guys", "Hi, guys". So for me, being a trans person, it took me like 26 years to own my identity. And, you came into a meeting room, or you stepped in and you said, "Hi, guys", you lost me in 10 seconds, you invalidated my 25 years of struggle in 10 seconds. And on top of that, you lost my ability to connect with you. Because what people say is "you're being too rigid - guys

is a very gender neutral word". I tell them to do this experiment, go into a meeting room. Assume there are like 10 guys and five women, and start with, say, "Hey, girls", right? And then hold the meeting, just keep it that way, don't explain yourself, do nothing at the end of it, and do it for a week maybe. Then take feedback from those guys. The guys that were there in the room, talk to them and ask them how they felt. And ask them, were they able to connect with you? Did they feel comfortable in the meeting? It's the same thing, right? If 'hey guys' doesn't work, 'hey girls' doesn't work. It's a generalization of, or we have just normalized that word. It's not a gender neutral word.

Very interesting for you to share that actually. Because these are things, like you said, we've just normalized it. Moving on from that Tanvi, please share with us an example that you have seen, of successful allyship—maybe you've seen, you've witnessed, been a bystander; maybe or been on the receiving end of. If you have more than one example, it'd be great to hear. But please do share with us a story on allyship.

Allyship, I would say it's more about actions. So I started doing Trans101 sessions in my organization. And the best thing, it wasn't about the sessions, to be honest, I was trying to educate people and make people aware about it. But the beautiful thing that happened out of it is, I unknowingly built a safe space around myself. So there were a few people, not too many, maybe two or three people that had felt comfortable to come out to me. And that I see as a success. That becoming an ally is all about actions, the action, I took just one step of starting Trans101. That kind of built a safe space around. And that's what allyship is all about.

The second allyship scenario is about my mom—my parents in general. It took me a good amount of time to convince, rather than just bringing her to accept this thought, because they come from a very different generation, they



didn't have access to information. It was pretty manual. They were taught a lot of incorrect things, when you talk about this. So, for me to bring her to a level of allyship, it took me consciously almost one, one and a half years of work, but the beauty of it was somewhere around last year, at the end of last year, my family had visited me—my uncle, the children and all of that. It was a whole. I mean, everyone was there. And then, I had this thought in my mind that definitely, this topic was going to come up, because everyone knows about it. But then I told my parents if it comes up, don't be uncomfortable. Tell them to talk to me, I'll explain it to them. It's not a problem. The entire day went through like nothing. I mean, no one spoke about it, nothing; they left. And then, at the end of the day, my parents were like, "See, if someone would have asked, you shouldn't worry about it, you live your life, we will take care of it. Whatever relatives say, whatever someone says, we are there with you, we will be there with you as one. You live your life, you have the right to live your life. Don't worry about relatives. Don't worry about anyone else." But to get to that point, it took me some conscious one, one and a half years. But that's the beauty of allyship. It's a journey. It's not a destination. It continues.

That was really insightful. Thank you for sharing that. Share with us the work that you do for the ally nation, and why it is important to take it to the mainstream audience and how you're going to do that?

So Ally Nation was just a thought initially, when Ankita, one day Ankita just came up to me. She was like, can you build me some content around gender sensitization. So I have a few people who want to get trained. So I said, okay, and I started developing the content. And within a week or so, we delivered that content. And then we came up with this, I mean, it was initially just one free session. But we were not going to charge, it was just her friends, kind of a corporate friend. And that is how it started. And then it kind of became our mission. So then we started Ally Nation more formally. We started doing gender sensitization training for free, because we thought gender sensitization is something that should not be restricted to corporate walls, everyone and anyone should

have access to it. And the differentiator here is, it's being delivered by me and Ankita, we are both part of the community. And our only aim was, my personal vested interest in it was, I don't really feel safe. That is why I haven't socially transitioned yet, right. So my aim of doing this is to create a world that I would like to live in. And that is why Ally Nation started, to create a network of strong allies. And the only thing we do different from other gender sensitization trainings is, one, it is delivered by the people from the community. Second, we are creating a safe space for asking questions. That is not very easily available. So the curiosity that we spoke about in the first question. So we appreciate that curiosity. We give them an open platform to ask questions. And our only aim is Ask, Don't assume, you ask us, we are from the community, we will try to give you the answer most satisfactorily that we can. And we give them gender sensitization training. The beauty of it is we keep at least 15 minutes after every session, just for discussion. It's an open forum, ask anything you like, we take no offense, it's better to ask them now that we are giving you a safe platform, than going ahead and offending someone unintentionally outside.

We had more than I guess 150+ allies we have already trained and we're still connected. So we did not leave it that training. We still have our own WhatsApp group where we keep discussing, we keep those allies active; we keep posting content and beyond that. So, that was season one where we had a mixed bag of everyone—we had corporates, we had students, we had just the general public. But now, we are going to go more focused. Season two is something that we are doing very intentionally, for the admin staff of corporate companies and other organizations. So when you step into a company or any organization or any place for that matter, whether it be government private, whatever, the first people you meet are the people at security at the reception, administration. And we do all these, many of those gender sensitization trainings, have it happen at the corporate level for employees.



But you need to start at the ground level; because there were many instances in the last year, where trans people were denied access to places. Hospitals or some other places, I've had some experiences, I've heard from my friend. She wasn't let into an interview, just because she's trans. The security guard said 'we don't hire people like you. X Y Z.' It's a security guard saying that. But that is where I thought this is where we need to impact that the stepping into the door should happen without bias. Right? Because for many trans people, it's not even about going for the interview, it's just getting into the building. That is where the problem starts. We thought for season two, let's target this. Let's build a curriculum or and we are going to and the way we are going to achieve it as we are going to translate our content into local languages.

I think that's so true. Absolutely. One must be able to go anywhere with ease. And I think the work that you're doing is amazing. I hope this is just going to grow into many seasons, and you're able to reach as many people as you can. With that. I do want to ask you my next question, which is if any of our listeners today consider themselves an ally, how can they grow in their allyship over time. I know you said it's a journey, how can we become better? What are those two three things that people can do to improve, and consciously take intentional steps in growing in this space and being a good ally?

So the first thing, as I said, is education. Right? You need to educate yourself, you need to educate people around you. People like my mom, who do not know how to access the internet or the words that come from the information age— I realized something, that they understand better from the visual medium, because she is always hooked to the television. So what I did was, I intentionally showed her some shows, there's some movies that are inclusive that I feel are good representation. And that is how I got her on the allyship journey.

Second is whatever you learn, you basically pass on, you basically educate others around you. And education without action is pretty much it's just being a passive ally, you just say you're

an ally, but there's no action involved. So bring it into action. And I see, especially when it comes to trans people, there is a certain amount of discomfort, especially in India. So when I was even thinking about coming out, before that, I came out only to a few close friends. And what I told them is my question was very simple now that you're, you know, I'm a trans person tomorrow when I socially transition. Would you be comfortable coming out with me to a restaurant or any place? Would you have the same comfort that you have today? To go out with me? Right? And many of them and honestly I got some answers as NO. And that's okay, that's fine. That's everyone's discomfort. But what I want people to do is not shy away from discomfort. I want you to sit with that discomfort. I want you to realize why that discomfort is coming in, where is it coming from? Is it your own biases? Is it your lack of education? Is it your lack of exposure or awareness and the only thing you can do to break free of that discomfort is to face it? Meet a few trans people, sit with them. See how normal their life is? See how their struggles are. Expose yourself to that discomfort. That is the only way you can actually become an Ally, right? So I think those are the two three steps that will help you a lot on the journey. One is education. Second is spreading awareness. And third is exposure.

Yeah. I think you've really summed it up really well. And I think that's, that's like, definitely things that people can do today. You don't have to wait for anything to start taking action and become a better ally. Thank you so much, Tanvi for sharing.

We have come to the end of our interview. And with that, we wish you all the best in your journey. We are going to be your allies. And we hope that your Ally Nation has many seasons coming up, and all the best from my end. Thank you so much for your time today.

Thank you so much for having me, thank you.



**Thank you for listening to this episode!
Remember, we may not turn into change makers overnight, but all of us hold the power to lead small, incremental changes that can eventually make the world a more equal and fairer place. You can join the Accenture Vaahini Network, a networking forum for women professionals enabled by Accenture. The link to join is in the description of this episode. Also don't forget to send in your feedback and thoughts to us!**

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