



BE A

GOOD

COLLEAGUE

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A guide to civil courage at work

## Be a good colleague

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# Introduction

Saco stands up for the equal dignity and rights of everyone, for individual ability and the strength of the collective. Each person is a unique individual, but together we can be even better. We want to build a flourishing knowledge society, full of creativity and the exchange of ideas. For this to work, everyone's knowledge must be utilised and no one should be discriminated against on the labour market.

## **This guide has the following sections:**

- What does showing civil courage mean?
- The ten dos of civil courage
- The ten don'ts of civil courage
- Five strategies for good responses
- Five scenarios

## **What does showing civil courage mean?**

Anyone can show civil courage; it means that you raise the alarm about things that are wrong. It can often be easier for the person who is not exposed to discrimination or harassment to raise their voice. There is a need for more people who are not part of the affected group to take a stand when someone is the subject of actions and statements that are discriminatory or use stereotypes. For example, men who work to end sexism and inequality, heterosexual people who oppose homophobia, white people who work to eradicate racism or people without disabilities who work against ableism.

Showing civil courage need not mean completely understanding what it is like to be exposed to discrimination, racism or harassment. It means that we take the fight as if it were our own.



A good colleague speaks out if they see or hear another colleague being discriminated against or questioned because of who they are.

# The ten dos of civil courage

**For more people to be able to show civil courage, this section covers ten actions that everyone can take.**

1. Read about the issues
2. Listen (without questioning)
3. Raise the issues with others in your position
4. Learn about your subconscious prejudices
5. Highlight those who are rarely given space
6. Take a stand
7. Think about what you say
8. Find the energy to be difficult
9. Support others who take a stand
10. Learn from others

## **1. Read about the issues**

Learn about forms of discrimination and harassment, why society is the way it is and what needs to be done to change it. However, do not expect a person from the affected group to educate you; you must do this yourself. There is nothing wrong with asking questions, but if you continually ask questions that you can easily find answers to by searching the internet, you are clearly not putting time into learning more about what you are fighting for. Reading the information here is a great start!

## **2. Listen (without questioning)**

You do not need to fully understand what it is like to be exposed to various forms of discrimination and harassment, but you can learn a lot by listening to people who are affected. Listen to what they have to say without questioning their credibility or what they feel. You are not there to judge or evaluate what they experienced – you are there to learn. Make the most of it and see it as something positive!

## **3. Raise the issues with others in your position**

Once you have listened and learned, it is time to raise the issues with others: talk to people who trust you; talk to people in the contexts where you have influence; talk about what you learned with your friends and colleagues. Many people never talk about what it is like to be the norm in society and what this means. Make sure that these conversations happen. If more people became aware

of it, more people can be part of helping create change. You do not need to start with the biggest or most difficult questions at your workplace – showing civil courage is something we all need to practise, and it is okay to start slowly.

## **4. Learn about your subconscious prejudices**

We all have prejudices. They are a way for our brain to categorise information and find shortcuts to simplifying the world around us, and this happens automatically. When we do not establish systems to stop our brain doing this, we help create patterns that exclude people. Our hidden prejudices therefore contribute to the continued existence of discrimination in society, so it is important to learn about prejudices, how they work and the situations in which you need help to uncover them. Think about the contexts in which your subconscious prejudices risk excluding people, such as when you participate in recruitment processes or meet new colleagues. In these situations, make sure you think about why you have a feeling about a person or why you make a decision in a particular way – and whether it could be because you have let a prejudice affect you.

## **5. Highlight those who are rarely given space**

Make space for the voices of people exposed to sexism, racism, ableism, age discrimination and other forms of discrimination and harassment. Make sure that they are heard and given space in meetings, that they are considered for teams, that they are included in recruitment processes. Use your power to lift others.

## **6. Take a stand**

Taking a stand when someone else is exposed to discrimination and marginalised is the foundation of displaying civil courage, but is also the hardest thing about it. It can be particularly difficult if there are many people who see what is happening, because we tend not to do something if there are other people in the room who we think could also take action. Deal with the difficulty by practising in easier situations and working up to things that feel really challenging. In brief: train your ability to display civil courage!

## 7. Think about what you say

How we talk and the words we use are an important part of creating inclusive workplaces/contexts. Update your vocabulary, ask the person you are talking to which pronoun they prefer, avoid using gendered generalisations or diagnoses as a description of how you are behaving.

## 8. Find the energy to be difficult

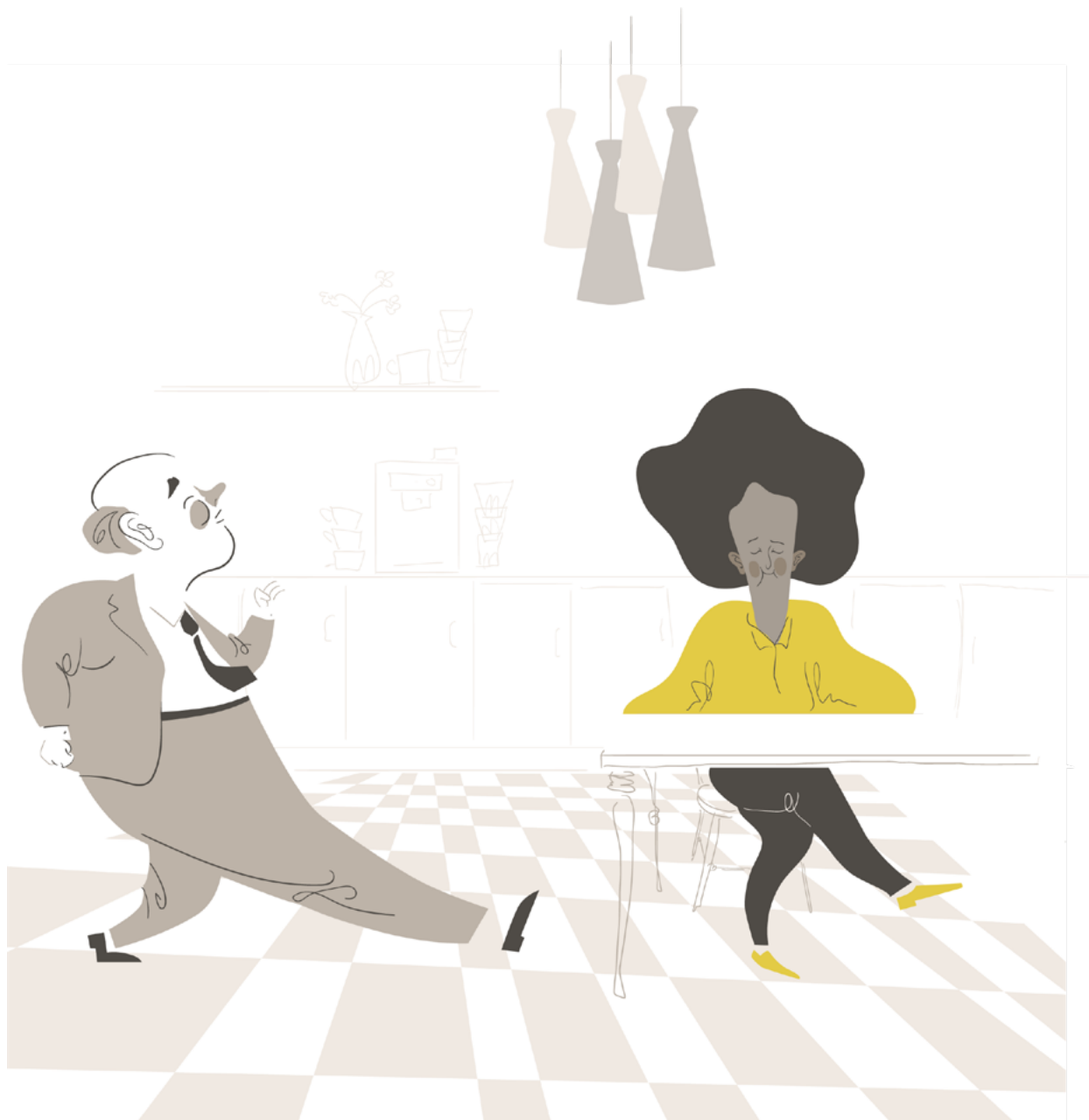
There is no “perfect” situation in which to raise issues relating to racism, sexism or other forms of discrimination. Often, people will feel uncomfortable and think you are being difficult. Remember that the reason why people think you are making things uncomfortable could be because you are right.

## 9. Support others who take a stand

The feeling of not receiving support from others when you take a stand may mean that you do not do it. Therefore, you can be the person who always backs up someone who takes a stand. In this way, you contribute to creating a culture in which many people show civil courage.

## 10. Learn from others

How we behave is greatly influenced by our observations of how others behave, so learn from people you admire or look up to. Read about people who have stood up for others, listen to their stories and look for examples you can learn from.



# The ten don'ts of civil courage

**Unfortunately, good intentions are not always enough. There are many pitfalls that anyone showing civil courage should be aware of. To make it easier to show civil courage, this section highlights things that are best avoided.**

1. Don't assume that you know
2. Don't forget to screen your questions
3. Don't assume that everyone shares the same experiences
4. Don't expect praise
5. Don't make the issues about you
6. Don't ask someone to educate you
7. Don't compare yourself with how others have experienced discrimination
8. Don't say that you understand just what it's like
9. Your good intentions are not enough
10. Don't boast about your civil courage

## **1. Don't assume that you know**

Don't assume that someone's identity is visible from their external appearance. For example, don't make assumptions about someone's gender identity because you think you can see which sex they are, or about someone's ethnicity because you think their name does not sound Swedish

## **2. Don't forget to screen your questions**

Curiosity is good, particularly if you want to learn more about power relationships, inequality, etc., but remember that your colleague may have had to answer the question "Where are you from?" hundreds of times before you ask it. Therefore, sort your questions into those to which you need to know the answer and those that are nice for you to know about or which you want answered for more personal reasons. Ask your close friends the questions to which you need to know the answer, or ask them in a context where someone has taken on the role of teaching you more about the subject. Look for answers to everything else on the internet.

## **3. Don't assume that everyone shares the same experiences**

Listening to people from groups that experience discrimination is a good thing, but just because some people experience victimisation or margina-

lisation does not mean that everyone in that group feels discriminated against. Respect that not everyone in a group shares the same experiences.

## **4. Don't expect praise**

Show civil courage because you believe it makes the world a better place, not to receive praise or feel good about yourself. If that is your motivation, you are doing it for the wrong reasons.

## **5. Don't make the issues about you**

It is easy to feel guilty or ashamed when you realise your privileges, but talking about your sense of guilt and shame makes the conversation about you, and can quickly get a bit self-centred. Realise that the issues are not about you, and that having a bad conscience will not help matters. Instead, focus on doing something about the inequality that is giving you a bad conscience

## **6. Don't ask someone to educate you**

Do not expect someone who has experienced discrimination and harassment to educate you about the issues. Of course, you can ask questions, but do not ask ones that a search on the internet would answer for you. Take your responsibility for learning seriously.

## **7. Don't compare yourself with how others have experienced discrimination**

If, in the middle of a conversation about racism, you want to talk about how difficult it is to be a woman and deal with sexism and inequality, you are comparing different forms of discrimination. Being discriminated against in one area does not mean that you are automatically discriminated against in other areas. Starting to talk about another form



of discrimination in a conversation about ableism or racism is moving the conversation to a different subject and taking attention away from the original issue.

### **8. Don't say that you understand just what it's like**

Displaying civil courage does not mean that you need to completely understand the battle you are sharing. So, if you are a man, do not say that you understand what it is like to be a woman in today's world. You can feel empathy with the group that is exposed to discrimination or victimisation, but you will never have lived their lives or shared their experiences.

### **9. Your good intentions are not enough**

If you belong to the group that usually discriminates against another group, it is up to you to earn the trust of people from the group that suffers discrimination. Having good intentions does not automatically entitle you to talk for the group or be included in their contexts.

### **10. Don't boast about your civil courage**

Boasting that you are good at showing civil courage is meaningless if you are not actively displaying civil courage. Practising civil courage involves active effort, not a passive position.





## Five strategies for good responses

It can be difficult to know what to say when you suddenly find yourself in a situation that requires civil courage. To make things easier, this section has suggestions for good responses.

### 1. Show that it's not funny

Simply say: "Jokes at the expense of others are not funny, particularly not about groups who experience discrimination/racism/ableism/transphobia/etc."

### 2. Get others' support

You are probably not alone in thinking that what happened was wrong. Get others' support for what you are saying by adding that other people agree with you. For example: "I think it's funnier when the joke's not at anyone's expense – I guess most people agree with me."

### 3. Ask an effective counter-question

Interrupt the person who has just said something offensive and ask: "When you say that, what do you mean?" This question forces the person to explain themselves and highlights the unreasonableness of what they said. If the person continues to say these things, you can repeat the question: "But how, what exactly do you mean?"

### 4. Expose the value judgement

Explain why what was said contradicts the equal rights and dignity of all people: "I don't agree with you, I believe that everyone is of equal worth."

### 5. Take it face to face

If it is difficult to speak up in a large group, bring it up with the person later: "I don't think it's okay to say what you said yesterday. It is racist/sexist/etc., and I don't agree with it."

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I think it's funnier when the joke's not at anyone's expense – I guess most people agree with me.

Be a good colleague – show civil courage at work.



# Five scenarios

**Here are five scenarios that may occur in the workplace and in which you may need to act. They are deliberately vague, and cover situations in which it may be difficult to know if what just happened was wrong.**

## **1. When diagnoses are used as a joke or an insult**

You and a colleague are giving a presentation to a group of people. Your colleague describes an exercise and goes into detail about how to do it, then suddenly says, “That was a bit Aspergery of me” and laughs. The problem is that your colleague does not have Asberger syndrome. Saying something to your colleague in front the group may feel a bit awkward. Wait until there is a break and bring it up then. Focus on what happened and how you experienced it. Say that you do not think it’s okay to make jokes at other people’s expense.

## **2. When being outside the norm is a reason to doubt someone**

You are talking about an upcoming recruitment process at work, when a colleague says: “We’ve tried employing older people on the team, but it hasn’t worked and they quit. So we’re not taking any chances on older people this time”. To show that what was said was wrong, and that age should not be brought up in recruitment contexts, you can say: “What does their age have to do with it not working out/you not trusting them?” You should also ask questions that mean the responsibility for fitting in does not end up with the group outside the norm: “Tell me what you did to keep them? Have you thought that there might have been reasons why they quit and your ideas about age might have contributed to these?”

## **3. When stereotypes trip people up**

Over afternoon coffee, your colleagues – who are women and managers – are talking about difficult situations they have experienced at work. Suddenly, you hear a colleague say: “I really don’t know what it would be like to employ a man from the Middle East, they have completely different values about equality. How would he be able to take direction from me, a female manager?” Be bold enough to break into the conversation and ask: “How is a person’s background connected to their ability to cooperate?

What you said builds up stereotypes about a particular group and isn’t true.”

## **4. When someone different is generally regarded as being up for grabs**

You and a colleague are having a chat in the canteen, when another colleague comes in. They stop in front of you and start asking questions about your colleague’s hair, which they think is interesting. Your colleague answers the questions politely but somewhat awkwardly. The questioning colleague does not stop, and you suddenly see how they are bending forward to touch your colleague’s hair. You say: “What are you doing? You have no right to touch someone just because you’re interested. You must respect their integrity. Your behaviour is inappropriate and reinforces the idea that people outside the norm do not have the right to their own bodies.”

## **5. When the answer does not fit the prejudice**

You have a new colleague at work. They are walking around and introducing themselves, when they start getting questions about their background: “What an interesting name! Where do you come from?”. Your new colleague answers: “Lund.” But the answer is not accepted: “But really?” Your new colleague expands on their first answer: “I was actually born in Kristianstad, but I only lived there for the first few months of my life.” This answer apparently doesn’t fit in with what your colleague expected: “Yes, but, you know, really?” This is where you can interrupt: “It’s obvious you’re not interested in the answer if it doesn’t fit with your image of our new colleague’s background. Asking about a person’s background and not accepting the answer reinforces the idea that the person doesn’t match your image of who can be Swedish. I think you should think about why it’s so important to know about a person’s background in detail and what you base that question on.” You can also say that it is not possible to see a person’s relationship to their place of birth based on their appearance, so asking the question is not necessarily relevant.

Saco, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations, is the umbrella organisation for Sweden's graduate professionals. We are a politically independent union organisation. Saco's 22 independent unions represent professional and graduate groups from the entire labour market, including business owners. What our member unions have in common is higher education, knowledge, expertise and professional pride. In total, our membership is 700,000 graduate professionals.

As a representative of Sweden's graduate professionals it is natural for Saco to exert a constant influence on the level of knowledge in Sweden. Education and research generate knowledge, which is an investment in both society and the individual – and is one of the most important factors in society's growth and development.

