



JULY 2020

ON A PERSONAL NOTE

Dear Colleagues and advocates:

Many of us expressed shocked and outraged by the events that have been unfolding in America over the last few months. The gravity of the issues has certainly left myself and some of my colleagues and friends with feelings of pain, anger, guilt, shame. The mixed bag of emotions is understandable. But these atrocities are the lived experiences of many Black and Indigenous people for too long. The effects are long lived and inter-generational.

In the words of Maya Angelou:

“The plague of racism is insidious, entering into our minds as smoothly and quietly and invisibly as floating airborne microbes enter into our bodies to find lifelong purchase in our bloodstreams.”

As a black, female entrepreneur I find myself gripped with a sense of hurt, sorrow and fatigue. I am resigned to immense sadness that this cycle of violence and hate will never end in my lifetime.

But the ongoing events have overwhelmed me enough that I can no longer live in the gray zone. Nor can you.

We need to start asking brave questions. So, I hope that this very personal note offers a space for compassion, self reflection and a way into mindful dialogue.

Speaking up against this grotesque injustice is long overdue. Outrage in the moment is not enough. Nor is it enough that Black and Indigenous people are solely responsible to advocate for justice, kindness, compassion and dignity. If one of us is not equal, then none of us are equal. If one of us is held

down (and murdered) based solely on something as irrelevant as the shade of our skin, this affects us all whether we feel it acutely or subtly. When these hateful acts enter our psyche and begin to define us, it can have nothing but a long-lasting negative impact on our wellbeing. It affects our ability to evolve.

My hope is that the moment of outrage transforms into deep self reflection and individual action. How can you help me and other Black and Indigenous friends, neighbors and coworkers end these terrible crimes against humanity? There is some consolation that many corporations have chosen to address this on their social media platforms. I truly wish their call to action for equity and dignity continues beyond this spotlight moment. I hope their call to action and commitments continue until all of us are truly free from hate and fear. That our social and economic systems are re-examined under the lens of love and equity. That the uncompassionate blindness that continues to build countries, corporations and communities be rendered obsolete.

There is a lot of healing to be done. And some of my colleagues have genuinely asked what they could do to help. So, after the outrage, take the time to sincerely ask ‘what will I do, today and everyday’:

- To grow your consciousness to become more aware of unconscious bias in the systems you support.
- To fundamentally challenge your own thinking with enquiry
- To commit to courageous conversations and stimulate similar explorations within your social circle

- To use your influence to promote diversity and support Black and Indigenous voices
- To be mindful and connected to one another in this moment
- To show up in support and solidarity for our Black and Indigenous friends, family, neighbors and colleagues not just in this moment, but every day as represented in your actions and thoughts.

These are tough and courageous actions to take. But consider for a moment what it would feel like if you and your family and friends felt terror and discomfort going about your daily life. Or judged not for your potential or character, but for what you looked like in the eyes of blind hate or mistrust.

We have, most of us, succumb to being racist in one way or another. In subtle, unconscious ways, even in our support of systems that are inherently discriminatory. We are shackled to a past that has remained largely unexamined as a society. Our inability to own it and question it, will forever keep us living a life of limitation and suffering.

It saddens me to leave on this note before taking an intended break over the summer months. But it has become even more important for me to take the time to reflect and recharge. It is a good time to digest the solemn last few months; to take a break from the barrage of information, opinions and social media; to dig deep and pay close attention to our own inner dialogue, motivations and unchecked biases.

I hope these words from Maya Angelou resonates with you as it does me and wish you a summer full of light and open-hearted introspection.

Caged Bird

by Maya Angelou

A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing
trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own

But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.