The Colorado Health Foundation™



A Deeply Personal Reflection

We recently held an all-staff meeting at which every employee was asked to read aloud a letter they'd prepared about the personal impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. What follows is a portion of the letter I wrote and shared with staff – a deeply personal reflection:

As a Black Southern woman, I always have to manage that core, "forever" identity with my temporary identity as president and CEO of The Colorado Health Foundation. I can't separate the two and wouldn't want to – that intersection is where my authenticity lies. However, the pandemic has come into that carefully constructed and maintained balance like a tornado.

On a day-by-day, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute basis – on a cellular level – I struggle to check my rage as a Black woman about how this virus is so predictably ravaging communities of color across the country. I struggle with a primal desire to wail at the indifference shown to the completely outsized incidents of COVID-19 infection and death in my community.

I struggle mightily to not erupt when watching the images of armed White protestors descending on state capitol buildings because they don't want to wear a mask or they want to get a haircut – all the while knowing that force would be utilized against them if their skin was Brown or Black.

I struggle to contain the revulsion I feel when I see so many comments that we must be willing to sacrifice lives to save the economy – because I know whose lives they mean. And I am brought to the brink of exhaustion at the seemingly daily news of another Black life tragically cut short by someone who has power over them.

The fallout from the pandemic has compelled me into a self-examination like never before. How can I not think about these things as we, as a Foundation, plan our evolving, in-play pandemic response? How can I not think about these things as we conduct scenario planning and consider shifts in our long-term approach?

How can I make sure my personal feelings don't color my professional judgment? Am I even sure they shouldn't? How do I fulfill and reconcile the commitments I've made to Coloradans who have had historically less power, privilege and income with the commitments that shape me as a human? Are they different? Should they be different?

My leadership has always been centered around my personal values, and right or wrong. I've concluded that needs to continue. That doesn't mean the daily, hourly, minute-by-minute struggle lessens; it just means I've made peace with it.

The country is ready for things to "get back to normal." The thing is, normal wasn't so great for a lot of people – a lot of Coloradans. The work of building a new, more equitable normal requires our whole selves, including our personal, lived experience. It requires whole communities, especially the wisdom of folks whose lives are evidence of systemic oppression and power imbalance. And it requires fearlessness, something I talked about earlier this year.

This work has always been personal to me. I'm ready now, more than ever, to help families and communities create a new normal that honors and respects them, a new normal that allows them to feel safe, a new normal that allows them to prosper, a new normal that they'd be proud to leave as a legacy to their children – a new normal that allows them to breathe.

I bring ALL of me – my whole self – to this commitment. Who will join me?

Related:

- Read **reflections on the significance of Juneteenth** from some of our staff.
- Register for our **July 8 State of the State's Budget webinar (10 – 11 a.m.)**, where we'll discuss the fiscal outlook for Colorado's state government and its impact on communities.
- **Register for our July 23 "At the Heart of the Matter: Our Race Shapes Our Realities" event**, where Karen McNeil-Miller, president and CEO of The Colorado Health Foundation, will kick off a series of monthly conversations with local and national leaders about the impacts of long-present, systemic racism on the health of Colorado's communities of color and what we must do to spark change once and for all. While the coronavirus pandemic has pushed deeply entrenched health disparities into plain sight, many are simply calling for a "return to normal" – but "normal" wasn't so great for everyone, and this hope misses the responsibility in front of us entirely.

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