

THE REALITY OF COLLATERAL DAMAGE AFTER GEORGE FLOYD'S DEATH AND DONALD TRUMP'S AUTHORITARIAN LEADERSHIP: THE OVERFLOW INTO ORGANIZATIONS AND THE BEHAVIORAL EFFECT ON EMPLOYEES

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ABSTRACT:

It is not a secret that what occurs in society affects and shapes the behavior of organizations and its internal composition. When negligible but preventable actions continue to occur in full view in the daily news, Social Media or any myriad of news distributions, individuals at every level making up these organizations are effected, and must be held accountable in leading the change in organizations and setting moral and respectful ground rules for all stakeholders. Management must start to acknowledge and address subtle, as well as blatant changes internally. No more extensions for excuses or justifications. Turning away from transgressions inside the organizations have contributed to the results of many George Floyd's, if not their literal death, the death of their careers, hopes and dreams of success. Due to leadership within organizations that mirror the unbalanced, unchecked and unchallenged authoritarian leadership displayed by Donald Trump, the internal behavior has been left unguarded to metastasize and take on its own dysfunctional personality.

Keywords: Organizations, Leadership, Society, Trauma, George Floyd

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a reflection of events and situations that have occurred over many work years for one individual, as well as recollections and encounters over time. There will be entries that speak to situations, traumas, or events linking them together while also integrating them into a sequence of events. At times the thoughts may for some appear disjointed, but remain content, for the connection is there. Stay open for a narrative that is written to enlighten and allow the reader or listeners to challenge themselves to engage in the lived and personal experiences before deciding if the message does not fit your current belief, then it must not warrant your attention. Always remain open for what you do not know, if new knowledge is to be acquired. The paper will also bring in a few thoughts

from a personal letter written close to ninety years ago by Kurt Lewin. This is a personal reflection and not one meant to tag on to the narrative of any other individual and their story. This paper is based on personal interactions and discussed and delivered as planned and therefore will not attempt to align the author's beliefs with the irrational and sometimes offensive comments displayed across social media. It is not the authors attempt to explain to the reader how to interpret or personally receive what is described, but you are asked to be more deliberately aware.

An eighteen year old is shot down in the streets and his body lies there for hours, it is justifiable. Enter an apartment with a no-knock warrant and kill a twenty-six year old woman in her home because the up to date and necessary information had not been received before gaining entry, and it is justifiable. While the male individual shot back in self-defense, he was initially charged with attempted murder. Hold a forty-six year old man down in full view of women and children with a knee to his neck and hands casually in the officers pockets as the distressed man calls out to his deceased mother and mothers around the world with a conscience and a moral reasoning watched and called out for the officer to show some mercy. A teenager had the wherewithal to capture the heinous act and share its disgraceful act on social media. However, somehow because he was said to have used drugs in the past, gave some who sit on the pillow of "I know 'these' people" want to imply with an outright arrogance of ignorance and a touch of absurdity that his death may have been justifiable. If the tables were turned and the officer's knee had been on your loved one's throat, or that person were accused, tried, sentenced and killed before an audience, not just in this case but in the many cases that were not recorded, how might you react? A father, son and neighbor chase a twenty-five year old jogger down the street because they "believed" he had committed a crime and in a struggle the jogger is killed. The community is still waiting to see if somehow this too will be labeled justifiable. Then you have a seventeen year old young Caucasian man who supposedly was acting in self-defense when he shot and killed two Black Lives Matter protesters, immediately his act was labeled self-defense. Really? One should question #1 why a seventeen year old has access to a gun, and #2 why was he attending a BLM protest and #3 why would he need to defend himself at a Black Lives Matter protest? Then again the individuals he shot did not look like him, so it may be deemed, justifiable. These occurrences are but a few of what people of color have endured in just the past year in America, it is only now being captured in real-time for all to see. The nasty, cruel acts have been perpetrated in society and inside organizations for generations against people of color. Prior to the events mentioned above Colin Kaepernick, a football player chose to kneel during the playing of the National Anthem, to bring awareness to the inequalities that have been perpetuated in America against this community, but rather than attempting to have a discussion about what could possibly bring some healing to America, he lost his career, and no one said a blasted word, until the tipping point. Lives were lost because no one wanted to listen, but in hindsight maybe what Kaepernick was presenting, was a more humane way to treat one another. Those who know it all

and did not take the time to listen to Colin's narrative decided that the football field was not where anyone wanted to hear/see this display of racial inequality. People wanted to come to a game to relax and not think about such things. When is the right time or right forum to discuss these issues, and who gets to decide when a narrative should be shared? Would it have made a difference if he were kneeling to bring attention to the fact that head injuries of players are classified differently based on skin color? This issue is currently being investigated, giving rise to the question, where was the ethics committee when these decisions were being made? So, a person of color can take more trauma to the head than other races? Is this an uncovered scientific study much like the Henrietta Lacks cancer cell, or the Tuskegee syphilis study?

REAL LIFE REFLECTION

Imagine yourself in a training seminar and shown a video that begins with no disclaimers yet introduced by executives affirming in a matter of fact voice the following statements, with an awareness to the diverse group of individuals who would be viewing the video. "Remember when a white man slams his fists on the desk, he is displaying that he is the person in charge. When a black man with a title does this, he is out of control and may be someone to fear. When a white female raises her voice or sheds tears, understand that she is sensitive and that should be taken into consideration, you may want to allow her to go home to compose herself and relieve some of her stress. However, if an African- American woman displays these same behaviors, she is more than likely just not capable of handling the pressure, and that should be taken into consideration regarding any promotions. You are to disband a group of three or more Hispanics when they are seen speaking in Spanish because we do not know what is being said, therefore, we must remind those involved that everyone should be speaking English".

Obviously there has been minor paraphrasing, but it depicts the video's message and one can only assume how it was perceived by those in attendance and those most affected with the insensitive nature of the statements. This was not so much an eye opening moment for some, as it actually confirmed what was already suspected and sensed. While people of color in that particular seminar were acutely aware that neither could report nor react to the disrespectful and uncomfortable situation, as this was a training seminar and everyone there had been recommended for this prestigious opportunity. To say anything may have compromised the position as well as the reputation of the referring party. Besides, to report this unfortunate situation would have resulted in the content of the video and its purpose being minimized and justified by the fact that executives were the individuals delivering the message. If the reporting persons had been any of the people of color there was the strong possibility that the results would have been a labeling of being trouble makers for misinterpreting a "simple" video.

The message, its intention and intended audience were no accident and was meticulously orchestrated in such an organized and low key manner that some may have overlooked its delivery and may have even supported or made

allowances for not only the message, but when and how it was to be viewed. However, the unassuming manner in which some managers and leaders interject messages that are not necessarily shared by everyone in the organization have branded this type of thinking and behavior into businesses and organizations and over time even though these overtly discriminatory videos have been removed, the thought process and their intended messages linger. Interestingly, what may have not been counted on in the above case was the video's message was offensive to several individuals who were not people of color, and as a result the contents of the video, the site and the site executives were reported. However, much of this behavior was tightly weaved into the fabric of who the leaders of this site revealed themselves to be. Reporting the incident in no way suggests the behavior or attitudes changed, only the manner in which they were expressed, going forward. Moving beyond a learned behavior built on stunted or purely uneducated views of others rather than solid confirmed facts may not be an easy thing to do, especially if holding on to morally corrupt concepts is what holds one at the top of his or her pedestal. Even the most atrocious behavior displayed in society surreptitiously seeps into the internal actions and behavior of many who are high ranking decision makers. For organizations to be the example for society rather than society basically dictating the behavior inside organizations, the thought process of leaders and managers must actively and deliberately evolve.

With the countless brutalities carried out openly and routinely against people of color in America it became glaringly apparent that the contributions made by this group of individuals has been devalued to a point where individuals of any other race, even those who are first generations, receive more respect than people of color whose American lineage reaches back for several generations. The hard work, cruelty and disrespect that has been forced upon this group has been and continues to be unrelenting. Not only will the blatant political and undeniably disrespectful and highly visible mistreatment of people of color spill over into organizations but will further cultivate the behavior of its management and leadership style if allowed to continue to go unchecked. Who declared one's skin color as the deciding factor that decides if she/he is worthy of fairness when it comes to being treated with dignity and respect? The color of one's skin or the race they are born into does not and should not determine their worthiness. A comment to a social media post stated, "I thought Meghan Markle was hot, until I realized she was black". That was an eye opening moment to the idiotic statements and ideas that some humans use as logic. Either she is attractive or not. Yet, somehow her ethnicity erases her attractiveness. Unbelievable. This is a cause for concern as others work and associate with the individual who made this behind the computer screen. The troubling aspect of this is that he/she may very well be in a leadership, managerial or decision-making role. There may be a few major missed opportunities for the organization if the complexion is not favorable.

TRAUMAS TIPPING POINT

The paper earlier discussed a few vicious acts perpetrated against people of color within the last year. Those acts only compacted and exacerbated traumas that this

community has attempted to pray and breathe through after the lingering and non-stop reminders of the grotesque actions taken against children, such as Emit Till, Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, Carol McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Antron McCray, Yusef Salaam, Kevin Richardson, Korey Wise, Raymond Santana, and so many others. All were children when their lives and their dignity was stripped, simply because of the color of their skin. These are acts that occurred before social media, but family and community kept those memories alive to keep each other cognizant of the price society may force you to pay for being born a person of color. These and countless other traumas permeate the daily thoughts and fears of the black community. So, if societal behavior seeps into organizations, so would these traumas and behavior, and their triggers. So would the behavior that allowed these vial acts to occur and to continue to happen. People of color have as much intelligence and desire to succeed as anyone else. Even with advanced degrees, experience and determination, excuses are given while they are typically held back while others are promoted. As referenced in (Diangelo, 2018) it is not the mere presence of black people that is the problem, it is blackness with ambition and drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands for full and equal citizenship. Toxic leaders in organizations realize that as long as a pat on the back and an occasional minimum raise satisfies the employees of color, nothing else is required. That is the cancer that no one wants to touch, so it continues to grow and spread. It is debilitating and emasculating. That in and of itself is a knee to the neck- with hands in casually in the pocket, because no one wants to say or do anything to right this wrong.

These traumas may be deeper than imaginable and so painful that many cannot relate or comprehend the impact or scope of the invisible wounds, humility and burden that is carried by those whom we work and associate with on a day to day basis. Recalling interviews of women who aged out of Foster Care it was learned that once someone has experienced many types of trauma they are intensely aware of subliminal messages and are unusually perceptive of their surroundings. Although the individuals who experience the traumas are not to blame, there is a sense of guilt or shame that may result in the individuals attempting to escape further pain. People of color have experienced numerous unspoken and unthinkable traumatic experiences that tends to make others uncomfortable, but it does not negate the fact that the trauma has occurred and cannot be undone. Passing judgment, corralling an entire body of individuals into one category based on ignorance, an inability to see past one's own consciousness can and does push humans beyond a threshold of comfort. Once the tipping point has been reached there is no turning back. This is what has happened in many organizations and communities, as it has in society.

Ironically as this paper was in draft mode "Everything Within Me Rebels": A letter from Kurt Lewin to Wolfgang Kohler was in a stack of articles to be filed. This dialogue was written in 1933 referring to Jews but is appropriate for today's communities of color. Lewin writes "I think it is practically impossible for a non-Jew to gauge what being a Jew has meant as a person, even in the liberal era of the last 40 years" (Lewin, Everything within Me Rebels, 1986). That statement can easily apply to any point in American history for a person of color.

Say 40 years times 10. Something not generally spoken of or incorporated in our day to day lives is the fact that many individuals of color are hanging on by a thread of sanity as they navigate life after experiencing one or more traumatic occurrences, many which occur daily in the work place. Many traumas occur in childhood, before the individual has the ability to articulate and or fully comprehend what has taken place, the wounds are buried deep, then carried into adulthood. The trigger may very well be a company video with either very plain language or a more cleverly disguised presentation. Organizations must begin requiring leadership with a moral compass.

CONCLUSION

There may be various methods to ensure American organizations become leaders in bringing a sense of healing and pride back to a nation that has been allowed to grow further and further apart, because somehow one race wants to be the only voice, much like a dictator while others continue to face inhumane treatment. Society will do better when it is required to and not until. Organizations must remain diligent, focused and aware, but most of all accountable. Employees and leaders must also hold one another accountable. Understanding who your employees are and they value that each individual has to offer is key to America's success in becoming stronger and a true leader, once again.

"There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have. And if you cannot hear it, you will all your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls" (Thurman)

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