

NPO

NONPROFIT QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

Winter 2023 | \$19.95

Love as Social Order

*How Do We Build a
World Based in Love?*

Activating Loving-Awareness



**Uprooting Oppressive Values
in Social-Change Work**

**Calling People Forward
Instead of Out**

**Building a Path to a
Counterculture of Care**

And more...



Meaningful change takes balance.



CLA has a long history of working with nonprofits of all types, and today we're proud to serve over 10,000 organizations across the nation. Our role is to take care of finance, operations, and compliance, so you can focus on your mission. Get started now at CLAconnect.com/serve.



We'll get you there.

CPAs | CONSULTANTS | WEALTH ADVISORS

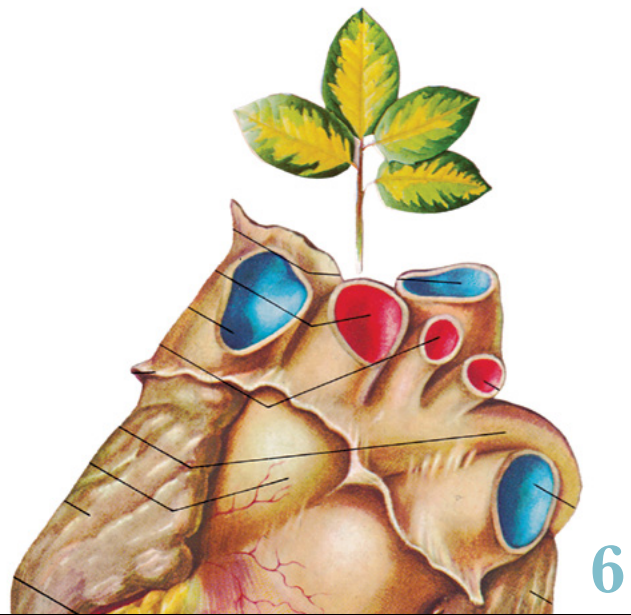
In This Issue . . .

COVER STORY

6 Activating Loving-Awareness

“Our ability to develop greater loving-awareness just might make the difference between our survival as a species or not.”

by *Sar King*



6

5 Welcome

12 Uprooting Oppressive Values in Social Change Work through Emotional Intelligence

“Any attempt at individual, organizational, or social change that focuses exclusively on external structures without addressing the internal expressions of oppressive systems will achieve only limited or short-term gains. This is because even as we try to change...we continue operating in ways that unconsciously align with the values of the very systems we are working to dismantle.”

by *Estrella Dawson and Matthew Taylor*



12

22 Healing Society through the Archaeology of Self™: A Racial Literacy Development Approach

“Imagine a civil society in which communities, individuals, and leaders (nonprofit, social movement, philanthropy, business, education, and more) regularly engage in the process of self-examination for the sake of improving our world. The Archaeology of Self...offers an avenue for personal and collective healing.”

by *Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz*

32 The Archaeology of Self™: A Conversation with Cyndi Suarez and Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz

“[L]ove is a literacy, like everything else. And we especially need this literacy in schools—because part of the crisis is that the children are not being loved the way teachers would love their biological or foster children. And I’ve seen love manifest through curriculum—a curriculum that invites kids to learn about their own identity, to learn about from whence they came, to (as the writer Robin Kelley would say) “freedom dream” a world for themselves. That is a curriculum of love, a curriculum of human flourishing.”

44 **Calling People *Forward* Instead of Out: Ten Essential Steps**

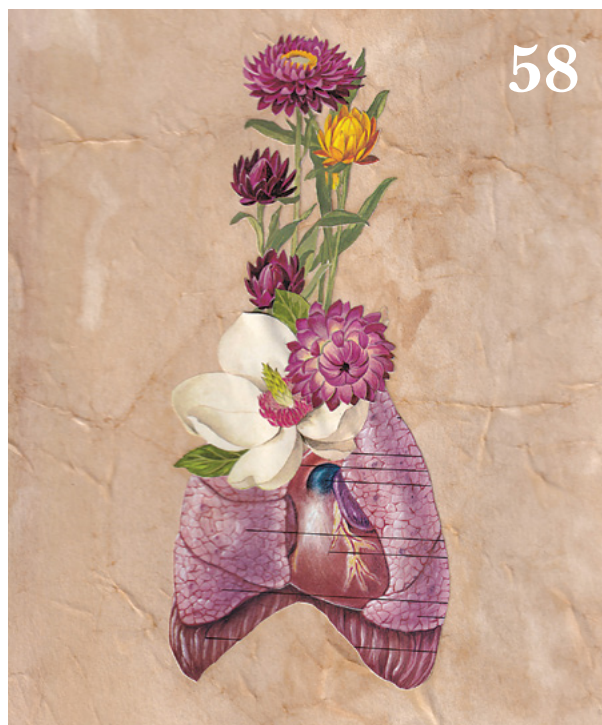
“An essential conversational skill is knowing the difference between *calling forward* and *calling out*. Standing in the future, we can look back and see that one of the things we had to collectively affirm is that we *are done with calling people out*.”

by Justin Michael Williams and Shelly Tygielski

52 **Hope Is a Practice and a Discipline: Building a Path to a Counterculture of Care**

“Sometimes we expect the energy and feelings that we need in order to build movements amid crisis to flow naturally as though they were embedded in our personalities. That is the influence of individualism. Just as patience is a practice, rather than a feeling, hope and grief are not simply things we feel but things we enact in the world.”

by Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba



58 **Love as Social Order**

“How do we build a world based in love?”

This is a critical question for social change agents. If we do not consider what drives our work, we may inadvertently be driven by fear or rage.”

by Cyndi Suarez

64 **ENDPAPER**

On the Cover . . .

“Mother Bird and Father Bird” by Martine Mooijenkink/
www.knutselfabriek.com





Their mission is focused on us achieving ours. You don't get that from a company that doesn't specialize in nonprofits.

Shelly Kuyatt

Director of Operations, Every Meal



THE STRENGTH OF A FEW CAN NOURISH A COMMUNITY

Proud to support Every Meal in their fight against childhood hunger.

Our mission? To protect yours. Get tailored insurance from a specialty provider and fellow purpose-driven organization. Scan the QR code or visit www.churchmutual.com/NPQ.



 Scan to learn more

PROTECTING
THE GREATER
GOOD



President, Editor in Chief
CYNDI SUAREZ

President, Executive Publisher
JOEL TONER

Magazine Editor
CASSANDRA HELICZER

Creative Director
DEVYN TAYLOR

Senior Editor, Economic Justice
STEVE DUBB

Senior Editor, Climate Justice
ALISON STINE

Senior Editors, Online Education
RHONESHA BLACHÉ, TONIE GORDON

Editor, Economic Justice
RITHIKA RAMAMURTHY

Staff Writers
REBEKAH BARBER, ISAIAH THOMPSON

Managing Editor
COTY POYNTER

Copyeditor
KATE ELIAS

Director of Operations
SCARLET KIM

Director of Digital Strategies
AINE CREEDON

Executive Assistant
HOSANNA RUBIO

Marketing Coordinator
MELISSA NEPTUNE

Digital Media Coordinator
HAYMANOT ASHENAFI

Digital Media and Marketing Associate
MEREDITH KLENKEL

Magazine Designer
KATE CANFIELD

Magazine Production Manager
MISTY HORTEN

Magazine Copyeditors
CHRISTINE CLARK, DORIAN HASTINGS

Magazine Proofreaders
JAMES CARROLL, DORIAN HASTINGS, ELIZABETH SMITH

Nonprofit Information Networking Association

JOEL TONER, President, Executive Publisher
CYNDI SUAREZ, President, Editor in Chief

Nonprofit Information Networking Association Board of Directors

IVYE ALLEN, Foundation for the Mid South
CHARLES BELL, Consumers Union
CHRIS CARDONA, John D. and Catherine T.
MacArthur Foundation
MAURICE MITCHELL, Working Families Party
CLARE NOLAN, Engage R+D
CARMEN ROJAS, Marguerite Casey Foundation
GENE TAKAGI, NEO Law Group

Advertising Sales

617-227-4624, advertising@npqmag.org

Subscriptions

Order by telephone: 617-227-4624 ext. 1;
email: subscriptions@npqmag.org;
or online: www.nonprofitquarterly.org.
A one-year subscription (4 issues) is \$59.
A single issue is \$19.95.

www.npqmag.org

The *Nonprofit Quarterly Magazine* is published by
NONPROFIT INFORMATION NETWORKING ASSOCIATION,
P.O. Box 961749, Boston, MA 02196; 617-227-4624.

Copyright © 2023.

No part of this publication may be reprinted without permission.

ISSN 1934-6050

WELCOME



Dear Readers,

There are times in society when pieces of a picture come together and an overall shape begins to emerge. The current manifestations of failing health and wellbeing on every existing societal front are one such example. As the wisest and most visionary among us counseled, the COVID-19 pandemic would turn out to be a portal of discovery—of ourselves, and of the world in which we live. The co-traumas of the pandemic and the boiling over of systemic racism, joined by climate crisis, did indeed prove to be such a portal. *And we are now as if standing in the doorway beholding the vast sweeps of what humanity has wrought.*

So what now?

As we struggle under the weight of global dis-ease: physical, mental, and spiritual on both the personal and collective front, and ranging from societal collapses of all kinds to planetary crisis—it appears that every human system, from family to education to work to healthcare to social care to politics, is breaking down at a faster rate and on a larger scale than the world has ever before experienced. *And more and more of us are re-teaching, remembering, reaching for the core knowledge and wisdom that many call the birthright of humanity: Love. Love as ethic; love as practice; love as the root of all we do. For if all we do is based in love for all, we can't go wrong.*

It comes down to connection. This means we must overcome separateness—the root of all human suffering—which has infected society at almost every level. As Erich Fromm writes in *The Art of Loving*, “Those who are seriously concerned with love as the only rational answer to the problem of human existence must, then, arrive at the conclusion that important and radical changes in our social structure are necessary, if love is to become a social and not a highly individualistic, marginal phenomenon.”

If we ask ourselves, “How do we build a world based in love?,” and put the answers into practice, perhaps we will find ourselves in the future looking through that doorway onto a very different landscape from the one we are looking onto now.

Cyndi Suarez
President and Editor in Chief
NPQ

Activating Loving-Awareness

by Sará King

■ If we evolve a way of visualizing our own and our collective nervous systems—and put attention to what we are both individually and collectively aware of, as well as to our blind spots—we might just be able to cocreate ecosystems that reflect healing, collective wellbeing, and loving-awareness in action.

This article was adapted from “Activating Loving Awareness through Contemplative Technology” by Sará King, published in *Can AI Heal Us?*, ed. Angel Acosta (House of Beautiful Business and Acosta Institute, September 2023). It has been adapted with permission.

As a neuroscientist, I am sometimes asked if I receive pushback for talking about love and loving-awareness in my research. **Love as an act, a presence, a skill, a relational orientation, and an intention to be actively cultivated is not a phenomenon that we can measure holistically in any quantitative sense.** However, many of our greatest discoveries in science in the past decade in the fields of quantum physics, quantum computing, astrophysics, and cosmology have come from teams of dedicated scientists testing theories that are decades (if not over a century) old—until one day they find a data point that begins to confirm the possibilities their models alluded to all along. In some ways, I look at the process of researching wellbeing, social justice, and even love in a similar light. We cannot say that we know as a whole what these phenomena are, but we have caught glimpses in our models that these realities are possible; and, therefore, we have hope that our combined creativity, imagination, collaborative abilities, and technological innovations will shed light on these future collective realities.

Perhaps because I was trained academically in the social sciences during my undergraduate career—exploring and getting degrees in linguistics, African American studies, and political science before I pursued neuroscience—my mind is oriented toward including phenomena that are qualitative, subjective, and felt in nature, toward the goal of creating interdisciplinary spaces where the ineffable and the objective can together flow naturally into an ever-evolving storyline. I am convinced that a critical part of doing science that is innovative is grappling with the theoretical, the liminal, or the things that we cannot say for certain exist in the





The central thesis I operate with is that the more we learn to love ourselves and to express this love in our relationships with one another, the greater the health, vitality, authentic care, and wellbeing we will all experience.

same way for everyone but that we intuit are necessary components of the picture of human consciousness to which we are attempting to give shape and voice. There is this aspect of exploration and adventure that occurs at the very edges of the human imagination that I love about my profession. So with that in mind, ***I talk about love and loving-awareness not as phenomena of which I purport to be an expert but rather as “North Stars,” to exemplify a way of being toward ourselves and one another that I think encapsulates what it might mean to live in a state of individual and collective wellbeing.*** The central thesis I operate with is that the more we learn to love ourselves and to express this love in our relationships with one another, the greater the health, vitality, authentic care, and wellbeing we will all experience.

A central aspect of cultivating this love I am speaking of—the way that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of “agape”—is to cultivate awareness of self, consciously. By this, I mean it is all too easy to move through life on autopilot, living from a place of emotional and behavioral reactivity that aims to blunt or ignore the enormous information coming from our internal experience of self, and that reacts to external stimuli either by running, fighting, freezing, or appeasing to ensure that we survive—that is, operating from the autonomic nervous system’s trauma response. This is, of course, a simplification of the complexity that is actually happening within our daily experience of life, but it also describes what life in survival mode feels like, which thousands of people have described to me in my trauma-healing work and research. People tell me that they sometimes feel they are grasping from moment to moment for a feeling of true belonging, connectivity, and empathy in their homes and workplaces, but instead feel depleted by the nonstop expectation that they perform some semblance of perfection and productivity while the world is literally burning down around us. This can produce feelings of great cognitive dissonance. We know that interconnection and interdependence are our birthright, but they can feel so mystifying, because it seems too hard to get there, and violence and separation of all kinds seem so persistent.

Our world is moving at such a frighteningly fast pace, and it feels impossible to move every day at the speed of

capitalism. ***The frenetic energy of work, and the labor that is required to make a basic living, can seem untenable to a person who also wants to experience rest, rejuvenation, moments of slowing down, and connecting with oneself, others, and the environment***—all things we need for our wellbeing, and all of which need to be supported by our external cultures/society. The conscious cultivation of awareness, or the application of awareness-based practices that teach us how to pay attention to our own experience as a witness—and therefore a subject of life rather than an object that life is happening to—can be incredibly empowering. Our capacity to gently encourage and guide our attention back to our body in the present moment and sense into what we are thinking, feeling, emoting, remembering—or how our bodies are moving in space relative to other bodies and objects—is a superpower that should be developed and not taken for granted. In a world in which we must constantly question the “realness” and authenticity of the stimuli that we encounter, developing space that empowers us to tap into our capacity to know our own experience as valid and real might be one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves.

I want to emphasize here that I don’t believe that cultivating awareness of self in the present moment is enough to move toward healing or wellbeing. You can become as aware as you want of what is happening inside you, as well as in the world, and not be motivated to act toward the benefit of anyone other than yourself—meaning, the skill of being aware can reach the wall of the self and go no further. I am passionate about exploring the question of what loving-awareness is and how we can build it as a skill set individually and collectively, because then we can consciously turn toward emotional states such as gratitude, acceptance, loving-kindness, compassion, and relational practices like forgiveness, and see how their application in the context of cultivating awareness may be integral to our ability to bring healing to our own hearts as well as to local and global communities.

From 2019 to 2022, I conducted quite unconventional research on the science of social justice, or SSJ, fostered by and developed as part of a National Institutes of Health-sponsored postdoctoral fellowship in neurology at Oregon

Health & Science University—in other words, this unconventional work was sponsored by a conventional government entity. It is important for the public to know that novel approaches to healing are receiving support from some of the highest institutions of science and medicine, and we must always ensure that current and future generations of scientists know that this kind of work is valuable and will be funded. I define SSJ as the study of the intersectional biopsychosocial impact of the psychological (mental), embodied (physiological), and relational (relationship-based) intergenerational trauma that has resulted from centuries of systemic and institutionalized oppression of marginalized populations here in the United States.¹ It is the scientific study of how systemic oppression has a combined physiological, emotional, and psychological impact on individuals and communities. (Of course, the work has global implications; I have since presented on the science of social justice

in Spain and Australia.) My theory posits that the creative development and use of contemplative and embodied practices—which are biopsychosocial interventions (interventions that have impact on the physiological, psychological, and relational dimensions of our experience of health and wellbeing)—can be grounded in the investigation of how wellbeing relates to our identities.² This can allow scientists and wellbeing practitioners to explore how to heal intergenerational trauma as manifested in both individual nervous systems and *collective nervous systems* (a term I have coined) to support a return to holistic health for both individuals and communities.

When I use the term *social justice*, I am being very specific. By *social*, I mean the relational field of our interbeing (as Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh might describe our fundamental interdependence as humans); by *justice*, I mean

PROTECTING THE GREATER GOOD | Church Mutual INSURANCE

THE STRENGTH OF A FEW CAN LIFT THE LIVES OF MANY

Get the protection you need to serve those who need you.

See how a specialty insurer can protect your people, property and mission by scanning the QR code or visiting www.churchmutual.com/NPQ.

Scan to learn more

© 2023 Church Mutual Insurance Company, S.I. (a stock insurer). Church Mutual is a stock insurer whose policyholders are members of the parent mutual holding company formed on 1/1/20. S.I. = a stock insurer. NAIC # 18767; CA Company ID # 2867-0

Lorrel Miller
Owner & Director, Champion Kidz

Meet and Exceed Your Fundraising Goals!



**ResultsPlus
Nonprofit CRM**
allows you to track,
process and manage
your fundraising efforts,
wherever and whenever.

507-286-9232

800-638-2445

www.ResultsPlusSoftware.com

Success@ResultsPlusSoftware.com

loving-awareness in action. Defining justice in this way grounds the experience of justice in the experience of the body and in our capacity to develop awareness of ourselves in a way that is fundamentally oriented toward love. Of course, ***I am aware that there is no universal definition of what love is, but I feel for certain that most humans agree that when love is expressed, it is nonharming and nonviolent in nature and is the most powerful force for harnessing feelings of belonging, safety, and interconnectedness vis-à-vis our internal experience of self and other.*** When loving-awareness is put into action from a societal point of view, we just might see what collective healing looks like. I don't believe we have ever experienced collective healing on our planet—otherwise, we would not be facing the polycrisis of climate change, wars, pandemics, and technologically exacerbated structural violence that we continue to face today.

While seeking to embody liberation, it is important to recognize the places in society that are suffering from systemic inequality and where pain, domination, and violence of all kinds exist. This approach to understanding individual and collective liberation is rooted in a fundamental compassion for all beings and a recognition that some are experiencing suffering and lack more disproportionately than others—due to historical and socioeconomic forces such as racialized capitalism, patriarchy, White supremacy, continued vestiges of imperialism, forces of colonization, and other methods of systematized disenfranchisement. ***We are at an incredible inflection point right now as a species, and all of our actions to heal ourselves and the planet have immense repercussions for our children and grandchildren. Our ability to develop greater loving-awareness just might make the difference between our survival as a species or not.*** If we evolve a way of visualizing our own and our collective nervous systems—and put attention to what we are both individually and collectively aware of, as well as to our blind spots—we might just be able to cocreate ecosystems that reflect healing, collective wellbeing, and loving-awareness in action.

NOTES

1. See Sará King, "The 'Science of Social Justice': An Interdisciplinary Theoretical Framework Grounded in Neuroscience, Education, and Anthropology towards Healing Intergenerational Trauma," *Journal of Contemplative Inquiry* 9, no. 1 (2022): 210–41.
2. In my research, I posit that the ways in which we identify impact the ways in which our stress response—as well as the trauma response of our nervous system—might get activated. I also propose that this nervous system activation might be the result of intergenerational trauma responses that have been passed down by our ancestors, which is an epigenetic point of view.

DR. SARÁ KING, CEO of MindHeart Collective, is also a mother, neuroscientist, political and learning scientist, medical anthropologist, social entrepreneur, public speaker, and certified yoga and meditation instructor.

To comment on this article, write to us at feedback@npqmag.org. Order reprints from <http://store.nonprofitquarterly.org>.



esri®

THE
SCIENCE
OF
WHERE®

Why are thousands of nonprofit entities using a geographic approach to advance their mission?

Thousands of nonprofit entities and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) around the world use a geographic approach to advance their missions. This approach has a foundation in geographic information system (GIS) technology that enables faster data sharing, fluid collaboration, and decisive action. Viewing operations and outreach through a geographic lens elevates strategic business plans, enhances services, and promotes lasting change.

Scan the QR Code to learn more.



Uprooting Oppressive Values in Social Change Work through Emotional Intelligence

by *Estrella Dawson and Matthew Taylor*

■
Every gardener... knows that when you cut off a weed at its base, it grows back. Below the surface there is a whole root system where the fuel of the plant lives. So it is with our behaviors and our values.... To root out the ways that oppressive systems live within us, we must attend to deeply entrenched parts of ourselves that are concealed under the surface.

E

very gardener—everyone who ever had a yard—knows that when you cut off a weed at its base, it grows back. Below the surface there is a whole root system where the fuel of the plant lives. So it is with our behaviors and our values: our deeply ingrained patterns of behavior are fueled by values deep below the surface. Sometimes, without our conscious awareness, these values driving our patterns of behavior sprout from the seeds of White supremacy, patriarchy, and colonialism. This is true for all of us, dominant and nondominant groups alike. The roots of these systems are alive in each of us—living in our nervous systems and unconsciously driving our perceptions, decisions, and reactions. To root out the ways that oppressive systems live within us, we must attend to deeply entrenched parts of ourselves that are concealed under the surface.

We can't change individually, as groups or as systems, without changing below the surface.



EI provides a frame for getting to the intricacies of how we either disrupt or perpetuate harmful beliefs and practices individually, interpersonally, organizationally, and systemically.

Another way to say this is that oppressive systems live *within* us, often without our explicit permission or consent. Any attempt at individual, organizational, or social change that focuses exclusively on external structures without addressing the internal expressions of oppressive systems will achieve only limited or short-term gains. This is because even as we try to change (ourselves, systems, the world), we continue operating in ways that unconsciously align with the values of the very systems we are working to dismantle. The result is mental, emotional, and spiritual depletion; conflict and power struggles within organizations; and structures and systems that look different and yet yield the same outcomes as existing ones.

To lead change at all of these levels in a way that is effective and sustainable, and in a way that allows us to be well in the process, we must do our own internal work and support others to do the same. When we are working and leading within social change organizations, that means building organizational culture and structures that prioritize below-the-surface work.

But how do we get below the surface to see what is not visible to us? In our work training and coaching nonprofit leaders, we have found that an applied framework of emotional intelligence (or EI) provides the internal and interpersonal lenses needed to see and then to shift oppressive patterns within ourselves and our communities. In this article, we operationalize EI in a way that supports dismantling oppressive systems and building liberatory ones by:

- integrating internal work into professional development to improve the way that we manage our own patterns and responses while challenging others directly and with empathy; and
- advocating for and building collective awareness around internal work and personal responsibility as a first step in creating a culture to support the work of social change in a healthy, sustainable, and effective way.

EI provides a frame for getting to the intricacies of how we either disrupt or perpetuate harmful beliefs and practices individually, interpersonally, organizationally, and systemically.

As leadership coaches, we work with leaders and staff in organizations across the country working for social change, and we know firsthand that it is possible to use an EI lens to do this below-the-surface work toward leading more fulfilling and effective work lives.

This isn't only the work of organizational leaders, however. No matter one's position within an organization, the skills and approaches we describe support the healing and development of all—both personally and professionally. It is our intention for leaders and staff alike to gain a perspective of better ways, more human ways, for people to come together to work toward common goals. Chronic stress and burnout do not have to be the necessary outcomes of mission-driven social change work; it is possible to be healthy and whole in the process.

CASE STUDY: DEEPER EXPLORATION OF THE CHALLENGE

Nicole is the executive director of an antipoverty-focused nonprofit in a large metropolitan area. Her organization provides services to marginalized communities of color in the city and advocates for universal basic income. The needs of these communities have only increased since COVID, and no matter how hard her team works, they aren't effectively serving all of their constituents. Knowing that people are suffering and that inequities are growing, the team doubles down and works harder.

At the same time, Nicole's organization is experiencing unprecedented political backlash. Conservative critique, ever present, has become more extreme and violent in tone. What's new is that there is a progressive group singling out

*When we look below the surface,
we can recognize the ways in which
oppressive patterns live within us.*

*In doing so, we reprogram our
brains to recognize limiting
patterns of thought and behavior.*

the organization, accusing it of a paternalistic and White supremacist approach to engaging community stakeholders. Experiencing these critiques from both sides while doubling down on their efforts adds an existential weight to the work.

Meanwhile, the board is pushing to speed up growth and to soften certain messages so as to mollify some specific interest groups, and there are requests and stipulations from funders that feel antithetical to the needs of the community.

In addition to these external challenges, there are internal conflicts among staff and leadership (not including the board) focused on equity. These internal equity battles are diverting resources from the battles the organization is fighting for its stakeholders. While these internal rifts focus mostly on race and gender, there is also a generational divide at play, making challenges even more complicated to make sense of and discuss.

Nicole works 60-plus-hour weeks, and she spends a good deal of that time responding to these challenges. She is experiencing chronic burnout. In this state, she is constantly grappling, both internally and externally, with competing values and commitments. And the ever-increasing urgency of the mission has her experiencing tunnel vision: overprioritizing the most urgent challenges while losing perspective on the big picture.

So, where to begin? People tend to come to us when they are at the end of their rope, like Nicole. They are often seeking a quick technical fix toward being more effective both as individuals and in their organizations. As coaches who work from an EI lens, we invite clients like Nicole to shift their attention for a moment from *skills and actions* to *mindsets and emotions*—because what they seek to change requires new mindsets and behaviors, and new mindsets are the unseen roots required to establish new behaviors.

Our invitation to mindset and emotion work is often met with resistance: “I don’t have time for that. I have real work to do. Just tell me what I need to do to deal with all these challenges.” Embedded in such responses are internal obstacles we have come to recognize as cycles of urgency that can lead to tunnel vision. The challenges of mission-driven work are urgent, but operating only in urgency disempowers us and robs us of our locus of control. Urgency can also lead to unconsciously falling into default values that are in alignment with an oppressive system: an *overemphasis* on urgency,

productivity, and results causes us to live into values connected to White cultural norms and colonization. Ironically, we find ourselves working by the rules—the values—of oppressive systems we are fighting to dismantle. When our focus is consumed by just the immediate problem, this can cause us to lose sight of our larger mission and vision and to make choices out of alignment with our true values. Our decisions can become less inclusive, less equitable, less collaborative. The end result, when urgency causes us to be out of balance, will tend to be a reduction in creativity when working and problem-solving; erasure of the necessary human elements of joy, rest, and balance; and real harm to each other and ourselves in the process.

START WITH SELF-AWARENESS

When we look below the surface, we can recognize the ways in which oppressive patterns live within us. In doing so, we reprogram our brains to recognize limiting patterns of thought and behavior and build new internal strategies to create new patterns. We get to the roots of our internal obstacles and can intentionally plant new seeds to live in alignment with our true values.

This process starts with building awareness of the tensions at our core—which, with mission-driven work, often revolve around our values. When we get stuck or lost in mission-driven work, there are typically two or more values at war inside us. In their 2001 article “The Real Reason People Won’t Change,” Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey call this values tension “competing commitments,”¹ whereby

To understand how you may be getting stuck in competing commitments, you must build deeper awareness about your emotions and the stories you tell yourself in key choice moments.

people experience tension between a value at the existential level and a value at the day-to-day organizational work level. In these moments, our mission, our stakeholders' needs, and our personal needs are often competing for primacy. The fundamental question to consider when this happens is: *When does operating from a value take us out of alignment with our mission and our humanity?* We can only answer that question if we are aware of our competing values in the moment. The following exercise helps to get to the answer:

1. Ask yourself, "Why have I chosen to do this work?" Make a list of core values that answer that question. Then ask yourself, "Why do I care about personal sustainability?" Make a list of values that answer that question. In these two lists, you will likely find many competing commitments.
2. Now, ask yourself a question having to do with a competing value, such as, "Why do I care about satisfying our board and our funders?" Make a list of values that answer this question.
3. Notice the tension in this soup of values that you likely contend with daily.

PUT COMPETING COMMITMENTS IN CONTEXT

To understand how you may be getting stuck in competing commitments, you must build deeper awareness about your emotions and the stories you tell yourself in key choice

moments that lead you to default to oppressive values. Think for a moment about a recent decision or efforts that did not result in the outcomes you wanted (for yourself and/or your organization). Now, think back to when you chose this course of action. It is likely that something happened that triggered an emotional reaction in you, compelling you to make a choice in tension with your true values in this context. Be as clear as you can about the specific trigger moment; then, think more broadly about how that trigger may show up regularly for you.

For example, when Nicole receives hateful emails from critics, or long equity-complaint emails from staff members cc'ing the rest of the staff, she notices numbness in her forehead, heat on the back of her neck, and shallow breathing. In these micromoments, Nicole is experiencing a chain reaction that starts in the body. *Because we process stress physiologically before we process it emotionally or intellectually, our bodies are our early warning system.* Where do you feel your reaction in your body when you are triggered? These internal body sensations—known as *interoception*—go unnoticed when we are unconscious of or find it difficult to respond to signals from our bodies that something does not feel okay.² And yet, these interoceptive sensations are unconsciously driving our behaviors as the first catalyst in this chain reaction.

Our physical reactions and sensations are interpreted as emotion. In such activated moments, we tend to experience a complex mix of emotions that focus inward as well as outward and that likely range from mild to very negative. Our emotions then lead to stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, about others, and about the world that do not serve us.

In their work on competing commitments, Kegan and Lahey focus on fear in this moment of being triggered. When someone is stuck in a pattern of behavior that they want to change, the authors suggest that the person ask themselves what they are afraid will happen if they make the change.³ One response of Nicole's might be, "If I do prioritize self-care, then my colleagues will see me as selfish." This is an example of a self-limiting story. *Make a list of the self-limiting stories that come up for you. Consider how these stories shed light on how your values can become your obstacles.*

Your self-limiting stories and behaviors serve you by protecting you from the fears that you just surfaced. While this may

*leadership practice is about
derailing the chain reaction of
ineffective habits at the level
of emotion and stories so that
we can choose new behaviors.*

seem illogical, consider how some of your choices might be making you feel good in the short term. *Consider how jumping into reactive challenges, doing work outside of your role, or even retreating to your office to answer email might have a short-term positive effect. As you consider this, try to write down the stories you tell yourself in the moment (I'm saving the day! I'm getting to inbox zero!) that connect with those emotions. What are you telling yourself in the moment that makes you feel effective or affirmed? What stories are you telling yourself about being a leader or a change agent? Being aware of how these positive emotions and stories serve you and how they do not plays an important role in shifting your patterns.*

The deeper our stories, the more connected they are to our identities. For those growing up in America, our 400-year history of White male supremacy makes it inevitable that racism and sexism will impact our mindsets and behaviors. Tema Okun writes about common internal or shared stories grounded in White culture that become cultural norms for everyone.⁴ Two that we observe among those doing mission-driven work are:

1. a focus on urgency—valuing fast, highly visible results as more important than building collaboration, allies, and the interests of communities; and
2. a focus on quantity over quality—valuing and directing resources to what can be measured while devaluing things that are hard to measure, like process and relationships.

The stronger and more exclusive the dominant culture is in your organization, the more likely it becomes that these stories and norms will manifest themselves. *Consider how the above White cultural norms and other narratives of privilege or oppression may be in play for you.*

USE SELF-MANAGEMENT TO INTERRUPT DEFAULT PATTERNS

We cannot stop our triggers and our initial interoceptive reactions—they are hardwired. However, we can manage triggers and emotions once we become aware of them. More important, we can choose the stories we tell ourselves in response to our emotional reactions. Self-management in our leadership practice is about derailing the chain reaction of ineffective habits at the level of emotion and stories so

that we can choose new behaviors. And as we practice choosing new behaviors, we are building new patterns—starting the process of reprogramming ourselves so as to weaken the impact of oppressive values and so that we can act in alignment with our liberatory values.

Creating a few seconds of space between our triggers and what we actually do is a prerequisite for accessing other in-the-moment strategies. This pause is the strategy that interrupts the cycle. It creates space for us to slow down and think. *What can you do to create space between your triggers and your actions? Do you already have meditative practices in your life, such as yoga, prayer, or mindfulness? If you do, you probably already have breathing strategies. A couple of deep breaths over a matter of seconds can be all you need to regain your ability to think clearly. There may be other micromovements that you already do with your body that calm you down (taking a sip of water, shifting your posture). How might you more intentionally do those things during your moments of choice?*

Once we have slowed down and returned to our thinking brain, we can access our “inner coach.” This is when we can choose which values to activate. Effective self-coaching helps us to choose our aligned values and not our unconscious defaults in the challenging moment. *Consider the values you listed earlier in the exercise. Now, take yourself back to the trigger moments/competing values. Ask yourself which of the values you identified will best serve you when you are triggered and in danger of defaulting to oppressive*

To change yourself, you will also have to manage change with others. Fortunately, in doing so you will help others grow, help shift culture, and help dismantle oppressive structures.

values. Choose one or two. Now, consider how these values can orient you to your true north at this moment. Up to this point, you have had a sort of “anti-coach” on your shoulder whispering stories and advice that have mostly held you back in such moments. Imagine a new coach—your “inner coach”—on your other shoulder. What can this new coach tell you that will be more powerful than your anti-coach’s self-limiting stories? Create brief phrases your new inner coach can bring to the moment. Write up to three of these and put them somewhere you will see them regularly, such as on a wall or mirror. Some examples from people we have coached include the following:

- *The work will never be done. It’s okay to take time to care for myself.*
- *Being direct and challenging others is an expression of love and care.*
- *I am in acceptance; people are where they are, and things are uncertain. I’m okay with that.*
- *What is in service of justice and liberation in this situation?*

Now, think about your identities. We all have intersecting identities (gender, ethnicity, race, age, religion, etc.) that impact the way we see and experience the world. Reread the first two lists of values from the first exercise and the inner-coach statements you just generated. Consider how your identities connect with and inform these lists and statements. Then, consider how intentional anchoring in your identities can empower you to shift your habits. Weave your identity narratives into the inner-coach statements you just wrote.

Our challenging moments—those when we feel triggered or activated emotionally—hold the greatest potential for us to change our patterns and create new ones. *These critical moments invite us to build greater self-awareness.* That means connecting with our bodies and noticing physical sensations, becoming aware of our emotions, and being mindful of our thoughts and stories—and how they are driven by oppressive values and how they are driven by liberatory ones. Building self-awareness in this way gives us agency to come off of autopilot and choose how we want to respond. This is where self-management comes in: we can use specific strategies to interrupt and manage our automatic perceptions, reactions, and behaviors (some of which have been outlined earlier). The key components are slowing down, creating space, and enabling empowering self-talk by activating one’s inner coach.

ADVOCATE TO BUILD A CULTURE THAT PRIORITIZES INTERNAL WORK

While working on one’s self can be empowering and transformative, it’s still only part of the solution. You can’t change your personal habits in a vacuum. One’s habits are inextricably linked to other people, cultures, and structures—and mission-driven organizations tend to encourage or implicitly expect some of the behaviors you may be trying to change. These organizational forces may be invisible to you until you start looking for them—so making personal changes will require you to diagnose and engage obstacles connected to individuals, teams, and even systems along the way. To change yourself, you will also have to manage change with others. Fortunately, in doing so you will help others grow, help shift culture, and help dismantle oppressive structures.

In the language of EI, advocating for change requires strong social awareness and relationship management. When coaching people to influence others on these below-the-surface issues, we operationalize social awareness and relationship management via three big questions:

1. **Where are those whom I wish to engage?** This question supports gaining perspective on the beliefs, emotions, and interests of those you intend to engage vis-à-vis your work. In our case (as leadership coaches), we consider where others are in their awareness (of us, themselves, the team culture) and motivation to support change (yours, theirs, and/or the group’s/team’s). This question

should be applied to individuals (peers, direct reports, managers), groups (functional teams), and the organization (senior leaders, the board, the organization as a whole) as you engage over time.

2. **Where do I want them to be?** This question supports intentional thinking about targets: the intended outcomes, or changes, you hope to accomplish through your engagement with others. These targets should focus on the behaviors, mindsets, and relational conditions that you want to shift. Targets that come up in coaching include managing up to create stronger personal boundaries and to advocate for shifts in structures and culture; raising individual and group awareness about mindsets, behaviors, and their impact; and supporting people individually to work on their own competing values and behaviors.

3. **What do they need from me to get there?** This question supports strategic thinking about how to engage. Note that this question comes after having gained perspective and identified targets. In our leadership coaching practice, we refer to this phase as the *EI dimension of relationship management*. In the following section, we describe three tactics that support clients in thinking through their strategy: *connection*, *care*, and *challenge*. In every effective human engagement, these three elements are present. When we practice strong relationship management, we deliberately choose the right balance of these elements to meet our goals. These choices are inherently adaptive, as we respond to the needs of the person/group and context in the moment.

PROMOTE CONNECTION, CARE, AND CHALLENGE

The first essential element is *connection*. Connection is about attunement—truly knowing where each other is in the moment. We emphasize authenticity here over harmony (connection does not always feel good, but it must feel *real*).

We offer the following as behaviors promoting true connection:

- *Vulnerability*—showing up as *you*, the human being who is working on these issues; sharing your story to make it safe for others to share theirs.
- *Listening*—confirming or revising your diagnosis about “where they are”; listening requires curiosity, asking questions, and responding personally to what we hear.
- *Finding common values*—both grounding in our common power and raising awareness about competing commitments.

The second essential element is *care*. Consider how you can bring genuine care to the conversation. We offer the following as care anchors in this context:

- Affirming others’ fears and competing commitments while also naming that those fears and values might be getting in their way.
- Expressing belief and hope in growth potential and commitment to shared values.
- Showing investment in them, the organization, and your relationship.

The third essential element is *challenge*. Change will never happen without challenging ourselves to make shifts. We ask the following questions when coaching clients, to deliberately challenge competing values:

- How can you call out the competing commitments at the heart of a challenge to surface fears and address them?
- How can you challenge others’ stories that underplay or omit the negative impact of current behaviors and mindsets?
- How can you push the conversation beyond short-term impact and outcomes to consider long-term impact and outcomes when analyzing current practices, structures, and culture?
- How can you name this short-term versus long-term tension as an equity issue connected to White cultural norms as described earlier?

We are most likely to achieve our targets when we effectively lean into care and challenge—at the same time—to stay connected.

**Deliver
meaningful,
personalized
fundraising
campaigns
to the right
people at just
the right time.**

Emma by Marigold is the most efficient and cost-effective way for nonprofit teams to communicate with and engage donors, supporters and community members through targeted email campaigns and SMS.

Get 50% off
Emma Teams and
Emma Corporate for
3 months when you sign
a one-year agreement.



SCAN TO LEARN MORE!



We have seen so many mission-driven nonprofits stuck in a cycle of cutting weeds at the surface and watching them grow back—reacting to the latest challenge with the quickest fix or tactical shift, and getting the same results. We feel deep compassion for them, because we see how hard the work is—and it's only getting harder. We also see that there can be a different way. We have helped people create the space to go below the surface and become aware of their competing values, limiting stories, and unuseful behaviors. This new awareness, coupled with deliberate internal strategy building, allows them to interrupt patterns deep within and disrupt the ways that oppressive systems have lived within them and driven their behavior. When people feel empowered and liberated, they are more moved to engage in internal work with their teams. Collectively—and from the inside out—they create a different way to do mission-driven work: one that yields better results and feels sustainable. When we slow down and create real space to do below-the-surface work—to get to the roots—we can find this way together.

NOTES

1. Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, "The Real Reason People Won't Change," *HBR OnPoint*, no. 8121 (November 2001): 85–92.
2. For more on *interoception*, see for example A. D. (Bud) Craig, *How Do You Feel?: An Interoceptive Moment with Your Neurobiological Self* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).
3. Kegan and Lahey, "The Real Reason People Won't Change," 88.
4. Tema Okun, "White Supremacy Culture," Dismantling Racism Works Web Workbook, accessed October 15, 2023, www.dismantlingracism.org/white-supremacy-culture.html.

ESTRELLA DAWSON is an executive coach focused on creating conditions for equity, dismantling oppressive systems, and leading with love. Dawson has an MA in education from UCLA, holds an associate certified coach credential through the International Coaching Federation, and has received certification and training through the Daniel Goleman Emotional Intelligence Coaching Program, HeartMath, and the National Equity Project. She is a leadership coach and a mentor coach with the Noble Story Group. **MATTHEW TAYLOR** is a career educator and the CEO and founder of the Noble Story Group. His work started in K–12 education as a teacher and principal, and evolved into developing leaders across mission-driven sectors. Taylor is the author of *The Noble School Leader: The Five-Square Approach to Leading Schools with Emotional Intelligence* (Jossey-Bass, 2022).

To comment on this article, write to us at feedback@npqmag.org. Order reprints from <http://store.nonprofitquarterly.org>.

Find hundreds of
**REPORTS, VIDEOS,
TOOLS, INFOGRAPHICS
and OTHER
USEFUL MATERIAL**

about helping to improve education
for children and access to
the arts for everyone.



Wallace 

Download for free at
www.wallacefoundation.org

Healing Society through the Archaeology of Self™: A Racial Literacy Development Approach

by Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz

■

As long as we are alive, we are continually discovering who we are and to what lengths we are willing to go in the pursuit of justice. The Archaeology of Self is an invaluable tool in this ongoing quest. It recognizes that a personal reckoning must occur before any individual can effectively champion social justice causes in society.

Imagine a civil society in which communities, individuals, and leaders (nonprofit, social movement, philanthropy, business, education, and more) regularly engage in the process of self-examination for the sake of improving our world.

The Archaeology of Self, a pivotal component of the six-step Racial Literacy Development Model (or RLDM) that I developed in 2018, offers an avenue for personal and collective healing via self-examination. This component provides a process for delving deeply into one's own life experiences and peeling back the layers to uncover the complex dynamics—specifically of race and diversity—that shape our perspectives. Engaging in such self-examination—by which individuals learn to confront their beliefs and biases—is crucial for creating and maintaining a more inclusive, just, and healthy civil society.



The Racial Literacy Development Model is an action-oriented process toward eradicating one's own racial bias with the goal of changing systems governed by racism and inequality.

I highlight this component because it fosters practicing the personal reflection, self-examination, self-discovery, and growth that are required for societal change. The work of combating racism is a lifelong journey. It requires that citizens provoke the growth and progression of society through examination of the policies and laws that impact their lives. The Archaeology of Self step of the RLDM practice helps individuals to guide themselves and others toward specific steps needed at the local (self) level before they move on to working on the global (society) level—because by first addressing and working toward eliminating racism from personal belief systems, individuals can then help to dismantle the systemic racism that permeates civil society.

RACIAL LITERACY FOR (AN IMPROVED) CIVIL SOCIETY: THE RACIAL LITERACY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

An active civil society forms the bedrock of a robust democracy. Throughout history, the United States has witnessed numerous instances when citizens' actions and engagement have reshaped governance and influenced the course of the nation. Civil society leaders must grapple with complex challenges rooted in social inequality, systemic biases, and cultural divides. These leaders face the uphill task of fostering inclusive environments, advocating for justice, and addressing deep-seated issues of racism and discrimination.

The Racial Literacy Development Model (see Figure 1) is an action-oriented process toward eradicating one's own racial bias with the goal of changing systems governed by racism and inequality. It provides a structured framework for individuals to engage in deep self-reflection and skill building by encouraging a continuous process of self-examination, learning, and advocacy to address systemic injustices. The model empowers individuals to reflect on their own assumptions, engage in constructive conversations, challenge prejudices, and actively work toward creating more inclusive and equitable spaces. The process requires love, humility, reflection, an understanding of history, and a commitment to working against racial injustice. People who engage in personal reflection about their own racial

beliefs and practices—and develop racial literacy in so doing—are then able to guide others to do the same.

Racial literacy development is a powerful tool for those wanting to sincerely engage in efforts that promote equity and justice. Racial literacy empowers civil society leaders to be more empathetic, responsive, and effective in their roles. It equips them with the necessary tools for addressing systemic issues, advocating for marginalized communities, and working toward a more equitable and just society. Racially literate leaders can uphold the values of a civil society by implementing policies and practices that are culturally responsive and inclusive—ensuring that the services, opportunities, and resources they provide cater to the diverse needs of a diverse population.

There are three tenets and six interconnected components to the RLDM. These are designed to facilitate a layered and comprehensive understanding of racial dynamics and promote active engagement in dismantling biases and inequities.

The three tenets are: *question assumptions*, *engage in critical conversations*, and *practice reflexivity*.

Questioning one's assumptions about race—acknowledging one's biases and taking the stance that much of what one assumes to know about race is faulty and incomplete—is fundamental to racial literacy development. In questioning their own assumptions about race, individuals are taking a stance that will foster active resistance to the racist and discriminatory beliefs, practices, and policies they encounter in their environment.

Engaging in critical conversations is an essential next step. The RLDM helps individuals to develop the confidence to discuss their assumptions and those of others.

Practicing reflexivity is a cyclical process of regularly reexamining perceptions, beliefs, and actions. This is a crucial step in racial literacy development, because this work is necessarily ongoing and will evolve or shift along with shifts in the environment.

The six components are as follows:

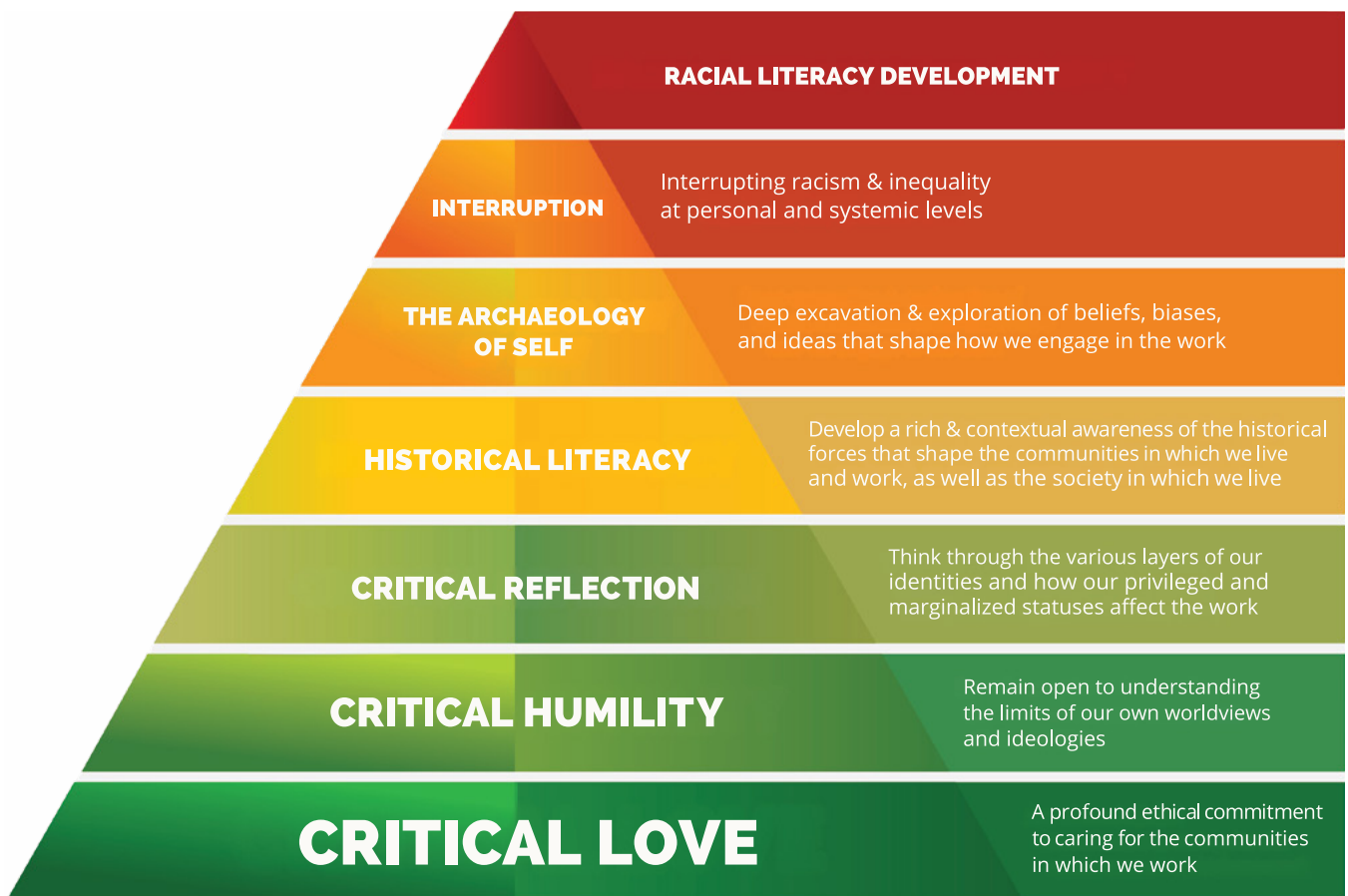


Figure 1 Racial Literacy Development Model. ©Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz. Design: Angel Acosta

- 1. CRITICAL LOVE**, which focuses on fostering deep commitment and ethical responsibility toward communities. For example, in education, critical love prompts teachers to reflect on their approach to teaching, ensuring that they prioritize not just academic success but also love and support for their students.
- 2. CRITICAL HUMILITY**, which is the willingness to acknowledge the limitations of one's own viewpoints and ideologies. Critical humility involves embracing a mindset of continuous learning, recognizing that our perspectives are shaped by our experiences and may not encompass the full breadth of understanding. Embracing critical humility allows us to be receptive to new knowledge, diverse viewpoints, and alternative narratives, fostering empathy and openness in our interactions.
- 3. CRITICAL REFLECTION**, which involves a deep introspection vis-à-vis our identities, acknowledging both our privileges and our marginalized statuses. Critical reflection is about recognizing how these identities intersect and influence our perspectives and experiences. Through critical reflection, we can understand our own biases and assumptions, allowing us to navigate interactions more consciously and empathetically.
- 4. HISTORICAL LITERACY**, which involves understanding the historical context of society and communities. In schools, for example, historical

Recognizing that it is necessary to hold oneself and one's peers and colleagues accountable for confronting and challenging personal and systemic biases is crucial.

literacy equips educators with the knowledge they need to engage respectfully with their students and parent communities. It also provides an approach to addressing historical injustices.

- 5. THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF SELF**, which encourages individuals to embrace self-reflection and self-discovery toward the action of becoming conscious of and evolving away from preconceived notions and biases. The Archaeology of Self allows for a more open-minded and inclusive approach to working and living in society.
- 6. INTERRUPTION**, which is the active process of confronting and challenging racism, biases, and other inequities. Through the lens of racial literacy, this action can and should occur on both personal and systemic levels. Interruption involves speaking up and taking action to disrupt harmful patterns or behaviors that perpetuate discrimination. This can range from addressing microaggressions in personal interactions and providing microvalidations¹ to advocating for policy changes to dismantle systemic inequities.

Recognizing that it is necessary to hold oneself and one's peers and colleagues accountable for confronting and challenging personal and systemic biases is crucial. This accountability helps to ensure that the principles and practices of racial literacy are actively integrated into whatever setting is the focus, creating more inclusive and just environments.

“KNOW THYSELF”: AN APPROACH FOR TODAY’S TIMES

Social justice work requires a consistent willingness to take risks for the betterment of others. As long as we are alive, we are continually discovering who we are and to what lengths we are willing to go in the pursuit of justice. The Archaeology of Self is an invaluable tool in this ongoing quest. It recognizes that a personal reckoning must occur before any individual can effectively champion social justice causes in society. Knowing oneself is essential for maintaining commitment to the cause of social justice; it

ensures that our actions and advocacy are driven by genuine conviction rather than performance for others.

The essence of working with this component lies in recognizing the influences that have shaped us throughout our lives, including our families, cultures, and society. It is crucial to pause and consider the extent of these influences, which often go unnoticed. Without this introspection, we might act reactively, without fully comprehending the foundation of our behaviors or perceptions of others. Self-examination should be the fundamental basis for approaching any endeavor that involves social justice; understanding one's identity in relation to others is critical for effective service.

As we consider the Archaeology of Self process, it is important first to discuss the perceived and actual obstacles preventing people from engaging in an archaeological dig around their biases and stereotypes. The process of the Archaeology of Self as it relates to racial healing is intricately connected to wellbeing precisely because it helps individuals overcome these obstacles and promotes personal growth, a healthy racial consciousness, and deeper self-awareness. Some obstacles include the following:

- **Fear and discomfort:** Many people are afraid to confront their biases and stereotypes because this can be uncomfortable and unsettling. It can bring to light deeply ingrained beliefs that challenge one's self-image.
- **Denial:** Due to fear or discomfort, some individuals may deny the existence of their biases and stereotypes, preferring to believe that they are entirely unbiased and open-minded. Avoidance of deep self-examination of biases and stereotypes can negatively impact mental and physical health by contributing to stress, cognitive dissonance (whereby individuals are grappling with the contradiction between their self-image and their actual beliefs), and strained relationships.²

This introspective journey fosters wellbeing, in that contributing to creating a socially just world leads to enhanced self-awareness, empathy, and better relationships—all of which support overall health.

- **Defense mechanisms:** Some individuals may become defensive when confronted with their biases, perceiving even gentle challenges to their words or actions as personal attacks. This defensiveness blocks open dialogue and self-exploration.
- **Social and cultural conditioning in a civil society:** Societal norms and cultural influences often perpetuate biases and stereotypes. Even in a civil society like the United States, which claims to base itself on principles of equality, people may be unwilling to challenge ingrained beliefs because they fear social isolation, closed doors regarding personal opportunities, or outright backlash. This avoidance can result in a lack of authenticity and also in inner conflict, contributing to mental stress and other health issues. (A current insidious example of this is the phenomenon of cancel culture.³)
- **Lack of awareness:** Some individuals simply lack awareness of their biases and stereotypes. They may not realize how their actions and beliefs perpetuate discrimination or harm. Ignorance in this context prevents personal growth and self-improvement.

The Archaeology of Self addresses such obstacles by providing a structured and compassionate approach to self-examination. By encouraging individuals to explore their beliefs, biases, and experiences through the power of storytelling in a nonjudgmental way, they are helped to become more aware of their own thought processes and how they contribute to societal issues. This introspective journey fosters wellbeing, in that contributing to creating a socially just world leads to enhanced self-awareness, empathy, and better relationships—all of which support overall health.

IMPLEMENTING AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF SELF PROGRAM FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

If your organization wants to engage employees in Archaeology of Self work, implementing the following eight steps can help staff, in a structured and compassionate way, start their

journey of self-examination—leading to improved self-awareness, empathy, and a more socially just working environment and world-at-large.

Step 1: **Establish an Archaeology of Self program** to educate individuals on the importance of self-examination. This can be achieved by providing workshops that offer the opportunity to address biases and stereotypes through the use of various resources—readings, videos, and conversation groups—that help them to prepare for and practice self-examination.

Step 2: **Build “safe and brave” spaces**, where nonjudgmental conversations, introspection, and reflection through storytelling can happen. Such spaces should be designed to encourage open dialogue and discussions in which colleagues can share their life experiences and beliefs without fear of criticism or judgment. (This is especially important right now, with the prevalence of cancel culture.⁴)

Step 3: **Provide storytelling workshops**, where participants can share their personal narratives and be encouraged to reflect on critical moments, experiences, and beliefs that shape their perspectives and decisions. These workshops should emphasize critical listening toward building empathy, understanding, and connection among participants.

Step 4: **Create “excavation exercises”** that prompt individuals to examine their beliefs, biases, and experiences. Exercises on the topics of race, schools, family name, and neighborhoods open opportunities for self-examination to occur. So much of our understanding of race stems from our formative years, as we are influenced by pivotal places and events in our development. That’s why I encourage people to engage in excavation activities aimed at recalling significant school memories, be they positive or negative; initial encounters with racism; and stories tied to their names. Names serve as a window into a person’s cultural, religious, or ethnic experiences, offering insight into the intersectional nature of race and other social influences shaping our beliefs. And reflecting on childhood friendships and the neighborhood in which we grew up allows us to contemplate the segregation or integration of our surroundings, revealing

Excavation Exercises



Race story prompt: Recall your first memory with racism—were you the perpetrator of the idea, or on the receiving end?

Name story prompt: We all have a unique connection to our name—some of us love our name, some of us hate our name, some of us simply feel that our name signifies a special family tie. This activity asks you to reflect on your own name and write a brief story about it. Remember, it's *your* story: feel free to focus on your full name, middle name, last name, or even your nickname.

Neighborhood story prompt—a series of reflection questions: 1. Where were you born? 2. Where did you grow up? Describe your neighborhood. 3. Where did you attend school? (Choose a school level: for example, elementary, middle, high.) Describe your classmates. Did you perceive your teachers to be similar to or different from you and your family? In what ways were they similar or different? 4. Describe the neighborhood where your school is/was located. (If you are a teacher, you can also describe your students. Are your students similar to or different from the students when you were at school?)

how our connections with others today often trace back to these early experiences.

Reflection through journaling, mindfulness practices, or guided meditation focused on exploring one's thoughts and emotions without judgment adds to the effectiveness of these exercises, and should be encouraged. (Such exercises can also be used as prompts for Step 3, where participants share their personal narratives.)

Step 5: **Organize facilitated discussions** following storytelling and excavation exercises. The goal of these discussions is to enable participants to talk about their feelings, challenges, and insights that surfaced during the storytelling and excavation exercises. Selecting an appropriate facilitator to provide constructive feedback and guidance is essential here.

Step 6: **Expect and encourage application of insights/new awareness** to everyday life. Provide reflection tools that guide employees in deliberate and purposeful self-examination of their daily interactions. These tools should help them define "critical incidents," during which they will need to address biases or stereotypes in their daily life.

An example is the *critical incident reflection*, which prompts individuals to be introspective about a challenging racial dialogue or experience they've encountered. Participants are asked to recall the incident vividly, identifying who and what circumstances were involved. They explore the factors that might have contributed to the incident, including personal, cultural, and institutional elements. Throughout this reflection, participants are asked to acknowledge their thoughts, emotions, observations, and reactions during the incident. They consider how they responded or reacted at the time. After reflecting on the incident, participants assess the impact it had on them personally and professionally. They evaluate whether the experience has influenced their current approach to engaging in dialogues on race.

This exercise opens up possibilities for a deeper understanding of one's reactions and perceptions, and provides an opportunity to learn from challenging discussions about

In a world grappling with profound issues of social justice, building racially (and thus socially) just local and global communities is both an ongoing moral imperative and vital to individual and collective health.

race, foster personal growth, and alter future approaches to similar incidents (practice of reflexivity; see p. 24).

Step 7: **Provide support and follow-up** through mentorship and counseling programs, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP), or your human resources department. Offer access to resources for deeper learning, such as recommended readings, webinars and other online events, and additional workshops and programs offered outside the organization.

Step 8: **Encourage accountability and continued engagement** by building Archaeology of Self work into your staff-evaluation systems. Assess the impact of the Archaeology of Self program through feedback surveys, interviews, and other qualitative assessments. Use existing assessments—such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT)⁵—or design your own that measure changes in participants' self-awareness, bias reduction, empathy, and attitudes. Use these data to refine and improve the Archaeology of Self program for future implementations.

IMPLEMENTING YOUR OWN ARCHAEOLOGY OF SELF PROGRAM

If you want to engage in Archaeology of Self work without the help of an organization, you can consider the eight modified, individualized steps below, which will guide you in fostering self-awareness and empathy and help you to contribute positively to personal and societal growth.

Step 1. **Self-educate** by exploring readings and videos on developing racial literacy, and finding (or forming) a conversation group to work on the principles together.

Step 2. **Create a “safe and brave” personal space** by mentally preparing yourself to be challenged by this work and extending grace and patience to yourself as you delve into your beliefs. Dedicate time for personal reflection and introspection without self-criticism.

Step 3. **Tell your stories** by reflecting on pivotal moments, experiences, and beliefs that have shaped your perspectives and decisions. Consider finding a therapist to explore these stories with you toward self-empathy, understanding, and action.

Step 4. **Engage in self-examination practices** by creating your own or using existing resources that provide exercises that help you to excavate your personal beliefs and biases, especially in the areas of education, family, community, and society. Reflect on your excavations through journaling, mindfulness, or guided meditation techniques.

Step 5. **Practice self-facilitated discussions** by initiating critical conversations with yourself about the insights you've gained, challenges you've faced, and the self-awareness that is developing through your Archaeology of Self journey. Give yourself constructive self-feedback along the journey. It may be helpful to record your self-facilitated discussions so that you can keep track of your work and progress.

Step 6. **Apply your awareness** during daily interactions and critical incidents you experience or that you witness between/among others. Strive for this awareness to become part of your daily practice.

Step 7. **Seek help and support** by looking for mentorship or counseling resources through your research or personal networks. This will provide you with enhanced support, learning, and growth. Invite a friend to join you on the journey. You can be each other's support and keep each other accountable, periodically checking in to report on how you are progressing.

Step 8. **Remain steadfast** and don't get easily discouraged or give up. Archaeology of Self work may get difficult at times, but there is so much to be gained by pushing through and keeping your commitment to ongoing self-examination and growth!



I created the Archaeology of Self self-examination process and the building of personal racial literacy overall to be tools for addressing the personal and systemic societal challenges we face. In a world grappling with profound issues of social justice, building racially (and thus socially) just local and global communities is both an ongoing moral imperative and vital to individual and collective health.

NOTES

1. Laura Morgan Roberts, Megan Grayson, and Brook Dennard Rosser, “An Antidote to Microaggressions? Microvalidations.,” *Harvard Business Review*, May 15, 2023, hbr.org/2023/05/an-antidote-to-microaggressions-microvalidations.
2. Robert T. Carter, “Race-Based Traumatic Stress,” *Psychiatric Times* 23, no. 14 (December 1, 2006).
3. Aja Couchois Duncan and Kad Smith, “The Liberatory World We Want to Create: Loving Accountability and the Limitations of Cancel Culture,” *Nonprofit Quarterly Magazine* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2022): 112–19; and Saphia Suarez, “Who Died and Made You Judge?,” *NPQ*, October 12, 2023, nonprofitquarterly.org/who-died-and-made-you-judge/.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Project Implicit, “About the IAT,” accessed December 4, 2023, implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/iatdetails.html.

YOLANDA SEALEY-RUIZ is a professor of English education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Sealey-Ruiz has published numerous articles and edited several books on racial literacy and culturally responsive education. She is the coauthor, with Detra Price-Dennis, of *Advancing Racial Literacies in Teacher Education: Activism for Equity in Digital Spaces* (Teachers College Press, 2021), and is the author of two books of poetry: *Love from the Vortex & Other Poems* (Kaleidoscope Vibrations, LLC, 2020) and *The Peace Chronicles* (Kaleidoscope Vibrations, LLC, 2021), which she considers artifacts of her archaeological dig around the subjects of love, peace, and self-knowledge.

To comment on this article, write to us at feedback@npqmag.org. Order reprints from <http://store.nonprofitquarterly.org>.



Empowering Nonprofits to Make Transformational Change

Contact Us Today!

www.ccsfundraising.com



About the Artist: Martine Mooijenkind



Martine Mooijenkind is a collage maker and graphic designer from Valthermond, a village in the province of Drenthe, the Netherlands. Mooijenkind has been making art since her childhood, inspired by her vivid imagination and personal experiences. She has ADHD, which she sees as a source of creativity and originality. Her collages are surreal and fantastic, made with vintage materials and digital techniques.

Mooijenkind combines different types of paper, photos, and stickers on a background, creating a new image with its own story and mood. A versatile and talented artist who puts her passion and feeling into her work, she likes to experiment with different styles, colors, shapes, and themes such as identity, dreams, emotions, and the subconscious. She challenges viewers to question their perceptions of reality, and invites them to enter her world of mystery and wonder.

Mooijenkind is also a graphic designer. She works as a freelancer for various clients, designing websites, magazines, books, and posters. She also works as a care assistant for people with disabilities.

For more information, visit Mooijenkind at www.knutselfabriek.com, or follow her on Instagram: [@knutselfabriek](https://www.instagram.com/knutselfabriek).



The Archaeology of Self™:

A Conversation with Cyndi Suarez and Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz

■

“A lot of the ancestral DNA does come from struggle, comes from remembering. I think when we choose to tap into the memory of what our ancestors have imparted... we just kind of show up. And in some ways, that’s why they call it ‘Black Girl Magic.’ But we’re just *being*. It’s nothing magical really—we’re just excellent and expect excellence of ourselves, and always have.”

In this conversation with Cyndi Suarez, NPQ’s president and editor in chief, and Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, professor of English education at Teachers College, Columbia University, the two leaders talk about what it takes for Black women to rise in systems that seek to suppress their progress and success.

Cyndi Suarez: Who is Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz?

Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz: Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz. Seriously, I’m still learning what I’m capable of and who I am. I do know that Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz is a little Black girl from the South Bronx, who at some point believed all the things that people said about Black people in the South Bronx—all of these things that now, as an adult, I’m trying to resolve through the work of racial literacy.

In 2018, I developed the Racial Literacy Development Model, or RLDM, which was initially a tool for educators but which I have since expanded to be useful for any individual or group committed to developing racial literacy. Part of this work has involved pulling out one of the key components (or steps) of this model, Archaeology of Self, because it was a component that naturally rose to the top for me after writing my two books of poetry—which I consider artifacts of my archaeological dig around love, intimacy, and self-knowledge. I thought: if writing these two books healed me, perhaps they can heal others, and that I should invite others to their own healing through writing—which is how and why I teach. I trademarked the concept, because a friend who is the executive director of one of the largest teacher organizations in the country told me that it was a powerful concept that should be trademarked—and of course, I immediately followed her advice.



“Are we in some ways marginalized? Absolutely. Sometimes, the smarter you are, or the more innovative you are, the more marginalized you are.”

So I think that I’m someone who has been fortunate in following a path in education and using it as a way to figure out who I want to become, still. I am *someone*. I love myself. I’m grateful for what I’ve accomplished. And yet I do feel like I’m still evolving. And what’s powerful is that what I study is what’s helping me evolve.

CS: That’s cool. I identify with that. I watched your TEDx Talk [“Truth, Love, & Racial Literacy”], and you spoke about how Michel Foucault said that to know the self is to write¹—that when you’re really learning, and really writing, you come to know yourself. For me, this has certainly been the case: writing has transformed me in such a deep way.

What has been your experience as a Black woman in corporate America and education?

YSR: There are many books that have been written about this—particularly at the corporate level. I think of the book by Ella Bell Smith and Stella Nkomo [*Our Separate Ways: Black and White Women and the Struggle for Professional Identity*].² And I think about the work of Wendi Williams, provost and senior vice president, Fielding Graduate University, California, who has a podcast called *She (Been) Ready!* and who just came out with a book about Black women in the academy [*Black Women at Work: On Refusal and Recovery*].³ Those two texts, and many in between, have really captured our story through multiple Black women.

Are we in some ways marginalized? Absolutely. Sometimes, the smarter you are, or the more innovative you are, the more marginalized you are.

Ideas are commodities. And the more your ideas sell, the more prospective students find you attractive and the more likely they will come to the college and study with you. Students equal tuition dollars; tuition dollars equal more money for the institution. So if your ideas (read research and personality) draw students, then you are “worth” something to the university. And yes, all of this may happen, but colleges and universities are *still* hostile places for Black women.

It is the same with corporate: I was a very successful marketing and promotion executive who brought in millions for the companies I worked for, but I still experienced marginality and racism. I was “valuable” to them but still was not treated fairly. They really don’t want you to go beyond a certain ceiling, and when you puncture it, you get pushed to the side. I’ve experienced that. So in the case of corporate, I always found myself on teams that never really received the big payouts, the bonuses.

I’ve been in advertising and marketing and promotion for the *New York Times* and for *Business Week*. I was also the first Black marketing director for one of the NYU schools, the School of Continuing and Professional Studies—believe it or not, as early as ’98. This was after being at the *New York Times* for seven and a half years and at *Business Week* for one and a half years. And what I found throughout that entire time, particularly at *Business Week* and the *New York Times*, was that I was always on these startup teams. In retrospect, it was an extraction of my ideas—I never got the credit, and I was always in a position of scraping things together, building a particular client base, and not getting the big money. And when I became too—I guess—creative at *Business Week*, I remember my boss saying to me, “So what is it? You want my job?” I’d been there six months, Cyndi.

CS: I identify with that.

YSR: And I want to hear your story! That’s why I mentioned those books—because for decades, Black women, Latinx women, mixed-race women, non-White-presenting women have experienced this. I remember saying to my boss, “No, I don’t want your job. I want *my* job. I want to do my job!” Eventually, within a year, I left that place, because it was just not emotionally or creatively safe.

CS: How do you bring your whole self to work each day within the compromise of academia and the politics? Someone recently said to me, “There’s no real model for women of color to be authentic in leadership.” So, how are you able to be authentic? Or are you able to be authentic?



“So, in some ways, I taught myself my position. I didn’t really get development or training in my work, and I knew that I had to show up differently.”

YSR: Oh, Sis, yes. I know who I am and I know whose I am. I am a student of history and I know the power of my ancestors. We basically built this country. I will tell you: being a professor—that was never my goal. So, in so many ways, I’m like an accidental academic who showed up.

I grew up in the Bronx. I didn’t expect even to be in corporate America, and I expected less to be here at my alma mater. And since I am here, that requires a certain level of responsibility for me to show up as my true self, so that others can hopefully have permission or be inspired to show up as their true selves. I do not want to come into a space and try to emulate Whiteness when Whiteness often means the death of myself and the lack of recognition of my people. Why would I want to aspire to that?

I was that way in corporate—hard lessons, absolutely. Were there moments when I thought Whiteness was best? Of course. That’s how we’re all socialized. But when I met my first mentor, Leroy Baylor (who happened to be a member of the Nation of Islam; and I am not of Islam tradition but the Nation of Islam is a little different in that members recognize the Prophet Muhammad but with a Blackness ideology), he helped me to come into my Black consciousness within the corporate setting I was in at the time. He had become a manager at the *New York Times Book Review*. Well, that and the *New York Times Magazine* were the bread and butter of that newspaper. The *New York Times Book Review* brought in millions of dollars—and he was in management there. And I saw him move in his authentic self, and that gave me inspiration.

CS: How do you do it?

YSR: How? I worked really hard, meaning there was more expected of me because they, of course, expected me to fail or did not expect me to be as good as my White counterparts. What I realized is that I was often (and this is in quotes) “better” than they were—because I had to dig a little bit deeper into the client base, I had to be a bit more creative. Where they might come into a marketing meeting with surface information, I would maybe go back five, six,

seven years. Where was that advertiser before the *New York Times*? What did they advertise? What new products are they thinking about? So, in some ways, I taught myself my position. I didn’t really get development or training in my work, and I knew that I had to show up differently.

And when you know you’re doing something extra and extraordinary, even if you’re not recognized? There were so many meetings where I would say something and...crickets—and then my White counterpart would say it and it’s the best idea ever. I would see White women who didn’t have my level of education go out on maternity leave and come back and be promoted, because it was understood they were raising White children and needed money. And here I am, working on a master’s degree, doing the work, and not getting promoted. So I mean, all of that. And I didn’t have the language for it then, Cyndi. I knew something was off—but I also knew my Bronx roots. When I was working for the *New York Times*, I was still living in the Bronx. So I’m going to this corporate America place, and then I’m coming back to my home. That kept me grounded.

CS: I think what I’m hearing in what you’re saying, too, is that—at least where you are now—there’s a certain freedom that you claim for yourself. A certain trust, perhaps, that you’re going to be okay. And so you almost do it without needing the external validation. So when it comes, you’re like, “Nice to have—but if I was waiting on that, I wouldn’t have gotten there.” So it seems like there’s a lot of internal work that you’ve done to trust that you’re going to be okay, even if you’re not doing what people expect you to do.

YSR: Right, yes.

CS: I think for a lot of people it takes time to get there. You’ve done the internal work for so long, and there comes a point where you trust the universe even if you don’t trust the systems you’re in—and you know you’re going to be okay.

YSR: And I don’t trust systems. Cyndi, you’re brilliant. I have never had someone give back to me what I feel or how I feel I have been living. And I didn’t take any course in it. I would

“And as we start rising, what do they do? They use government policy to say, Oh, ban these books or ban this other thing. You can’t ban a people.”

have to turn to my mother, who grew up in the segregated South, and my father, who grew up on Barbados—both of whom had very different ideologies about Blackness and independence. And them coming together, meeting in a place like Harlem, moving to a place like the Bronx, living in the housing projects, growing up during a crack epidemic... all of who I am and what was not expected of me out in the world but yet what was expected of me in my household is really what gave me that confidence. In terms of out in the world—*war on drugs, you’re poor, the Bronx is the poorest congressional district in terms of funding, the Bronx has the highest asthma rates nationally*—there were really no expectations. But in my household I have a mother who went back to school to get her high school degree at 47, and a father who was a licensed pharmacist when he came here but couldn’t get work. The two of them together convinced me and my siblings that we could do anything, because no one out there expected anything—so you may as well go for broke!

CS: Right. So interesting. In an article I wrote earlier this year, “Leadership Is Voice,”⁴ I quote Terence Nance, the creator of a show I love, *Random Acts of Flyness*, who talks in an interview about how he was able to have a show like that on HBO. He says that everything he does on this plane, he first has to do on a different plane, and then it manifests on this plane. If he tried to do it first on this plane, he would never be able to do it. And I so identify with that, right?

YSR: Talking like spiritual?

CS: Yes! You not only are self-defined on this plane but also know that there’s a higher plane that’s more powerful than all these other people.

YSR: Especially when it’s ancestral. A lot of the ancestral DNA does come from struggle, comes from remembering. I think when we choose to tap into the memory of what our ancestors have imparted—and like you said, Cyndi, operate on a level that is spiritual, which is very important to me—then, yeah, you’re right, we just kind of show up. And in some ways, that’s why they call it “Black Girl Magic.” But we’re just

being. It’s nothing magical really—we’re just excellent and expect excellence of ourselves, and always have. The imposing outside world has written a different narrative—or has thrown obstacles in our spaces, in our places, that we can’t be excellent. But internally, I think almost genetically in some ways, this has been passed on to us. And those of us who can tap into it do manifest amazing things—like you writing the power book and having that heuristic of inviting other people into their power.

CS: Yeah, I love that. My family in Puerto Rico are artists. My uncle, who is the person my mom grew up with, is the national artist. He created the vejigante mask. So coming from a Black family of artists, I have a legacy of creativity. And I’ve seen my family love Blackness and be upholders of the culture of Blackness in Puerto Rico. So yes, our legacies. And we are lucky enough to have those legacies—you’re right. It’s like, You can’t tell me anything.

YSR: What are you going to tell me, actually? My people built this place. They created math. I’m not taking away from other people, but I know that most of the everyday things that we use, including the cell phone, including the computer that we’re talking on, are inventions by Black people. And what’s amazing is that we go through a school system that seeks to erase us, actually seeks to beat us down—and yet still, we rise. Not without casualties. But this whole failure of a system tries to keep us from rising to understanding who we are. This is how much White supremacy, those in power, will go—to the extent that they have to fail an entire system just to make sure that we never know who we are and that we don’t rise. And as we start rising, what do they do? They use government policy to say, Oh, ban these books or ban this other thing. *You can’t ban a people*. We’re not doing that.

CS: It’s a lot of effort. Effort to keep that evolution from happening. You talk about “critical humility” [in your work], which I love. I don’t use that term, exactly; but at NPQ I talk to staff a lot about how we have to balance confidence with humility. You have to have a lot of confidence to speak the truth, yes—and a lot of humility to be able to be open to different truths and to always keep yourself grounded. I’d love for you to say

“If I don’t enter a space with humility, that means I’m cutting off my learning. If I cut off my learning, how far can I really go in my own aspirations, in my own flourishing?”

a little bit about how you think about critical humility. But further, it’s easy to understand how White people need that—but I think, too, that we’re in a time when, at least in our area of work, there’s a lot of dominant power there as well. There’s a lot that’s great about the social movements of the time that we’re living in, and there’s also a lot going on that’s just like the power that we’re trying to fight. And it’s kind of tied up with this language of empowerment, right? So, empowerment sometimes can be individual, and the way that it shows up in the work can actually be destructive. I wonder if you could talk about what critical humility means for people of color when one is also trying to become empowered.

YSR: That is so brilliant. I feel like you have the answer there, because the humility—the recognition that you have limitations to your own learning and understanding—it’s two trains running. It has to be in tandem. You have to first of all have a certain amount of confidence to be able to move in the world and to share the things that you know so that you can inspire others toward it. And at the same time, you have to be humble enough to know when you’re in the presence of a teacher. Usually, for me, those are youth or students in my class. I always tell the story of Dr. Angel Acosta.⁵ He showed up as my student, and I came to understand him to be a teacher.

It’s also the humility of remembering what our ancestors went through—for example, the Civil Rights movement. So, to never be arrogant enough to think that what I have done has gotten me here alone. And forgetting the dogs, and the murders, and the fires, and the burning crosses that my ancestors had to experience—when I know my history, Cyndi, that does put me, I hope, in a space of humility, of constantly having to remember what my ancestors went through and to learn from their strategies as I try to move forward.

So I think it’s inherent for those of us who claim to be learners—and particularly learners of our own history, and even learners of those who are living with us, whether it be Beyoncé or Constance Baker Motley—to ask ourselves, Are we humble enough to realize that we have all of these teachers around us and that we need them to even shape who we

are? I cannot teach without recognizing that a teacher, or multiple teachers, will show up as my student/students.

That’s just my orientation, Cyndi. Coming to you, I have to be humble. I’m learning so much from you in the short time that we’re talking. I’m taking notes, I’m writing things down. If I don’t enter a space with humility, that means I’m cutting off my learning. If I cut off my learning, how far can I really go in my own aspirations, in my own flourishing? I don’t know if that makes sense, but intertwined for me is this idea of knowing who you are, whose you are, and your own power that you step into—and being humble. Because arrogance and pride goeth before a fall. That’s the scripture. Whatever religion you ascribe to, it’s true. When you get too hoity and high—boom! the fall is right there behind you. Or right in front of you.

CS: Okay, I want to dig into this a little bit more, because I like what you said about recognizing a teacher. I feel like part of what happens a lot right now in social change work—from what I’m seeing and what I’m hearing from the field—is this desire for everything to be equal. And sometimes what happens is, you don’t recognize teachers. And I think about how my spiritual teacher has a spiritual teacher. So there’s something about being both, where claiming one’s power is concerned. I do the same thing that you’re doing when I talk to people. For me, recognizing a teacher is recognizing something different that I hadn’t heard before. It’s being attracted to difference as opposed to sameness. And I don’t think a lot of us are attracted to difference. I think a lot of us seek sameness. I talk about that in my book, actually, and I think it comes from Audre Lorde...or is it bell hooks?⁶

YSR: bell. She talks about the beloved community, and difference, and not assigning it to privilege.

CS: Yes, I think it’s bell who I quoted. In my research, what I found is that it’s difference that can trigger power dynamics—and the perception of difference and our attitudes toward difference. So what I realized when I was writing my book is that I’ve always been attracted to difference, and I didn’t even think about that as a positionality that’s not the norm. And so

“Am I wrong? I imagine that I am sometimes. But I also want to say from a spiritual perspective that oftentimes things come to me in dreams. I’ve come to understand that my dreams are powerful.”

I wonder, when you talk about recognizing a teacher, what do you mean by that?

YSR: I’ve had a few students who have shown up as my teacher, but Angel Acosta was the most recent and, I think, the most profound, because he led me into meditation. He led me into healing-centered work by observing my work through a healing-centered lens and inviting me into this role, or recognition, of being a healer. That had a profound impact on me. And when I think about his orientation in class, it was one of the listener. I would be sharing these concepts and would see him deeply listening, and then he’d come back with a question that allowed me self-reflection—and allowed the students self-reflection, as well. It almost became like he and I were the only ones in the room. That’s when I saw something different, Cyndi. There was something else going on.

So for me, when my students show up as teachers, it is often that—to use your words—they are making me think differently. They are challenging me. They are also *holding* the things that I am offering and sharing as possible knowledge for them. It really is a reciprocal act. And that has been embodied in my relationship with Angel: I continue to be his student, he continues to call me his teacher. And there’s a humility in that relationship. Because there are times when I’m speaking and Angel knows it’s time to listen; there are times when he’s speaking and I know it’s time to listen. It’s not scripted. I say it is spiritual, for sure—because I’ve opened myself up to him spiritually, also, so he’s able to say things to me that other people are not able to.

CS: I think what you’re saying is important, because some people come at you and try to give you something different that you know is not good for you. So there’s something there, with somebody offering it to you in a way that you can feel does something to your energy, where maybe it grows. How do you tell the difference between somebody who offers us something different that’s beneficial versus not?

YSR: It’s embodied, for me. And often it is not so much in the delivery, because the delivery can be soft and loving. But we know when it’s manipulative—you know if it’s self-serving

for that person. It depends on where that person is and on how deeply you know them. So it’s an embodied feeling. It’s also cognitive. And I trust my body—I’ve come to trust my body—and on a spiritual level, I’m an empath. I was always wondering, Why do I cry when other people are crying? Why am I laughing when other people are joyful? Why do I feel sad or depressed when people who are close to me feel sad or depressed? So I trust myself as an empathetic person to know that my body is giving me a signal. And more and more, I’ve been learning to pay attention to that. That’s how I know. Am I wrong? I imagine that I am sometimes. But I also want to say from a spiritual perspective that oftentimes things come to me in dreams. I’ve come to understand that my dreams are powerful. All of the images done by an artist for my book *Love from the Vortex* came to me in a dream.⁷ And to have been able to articulate what came to me for someone else to create with their own hands and mind relates to that humility we were discussing.

CS: I so identify with that as well. When I wrote my book, I sat down and meditated. And I asked for the framework to appear to me. And I just sat there, and then it came. And then I built on that. And it just kept coming. And the whole process was ecstatic.

And I understand what you’re saying about the felt experience, too, because we don’t think about that a lot in the work. I talk about this in my book, as well. As humans, we know what’s real through our pheromones—our smell hormones tell the truth, right? They cannot lie. When you feel when someone is telling you something that they’re being manipulative, there’s a dissonance that you feel versus an openness and a “yes.” In theater improv, there is an exercise, “block or accept.” Those are the two interactions that you can have when you’re interacting with somebody. You can either accept what they’re saying or you can block it. And everything you do is block or accept. And sometimes that happens without even thinking—your body blocks it. Especially if you’re embodied, your body might block it before you know why. That happens to me, where I’ll feel something off, and I’ll think, What is going on that I feel this? And then I backtrack and realize what it is.

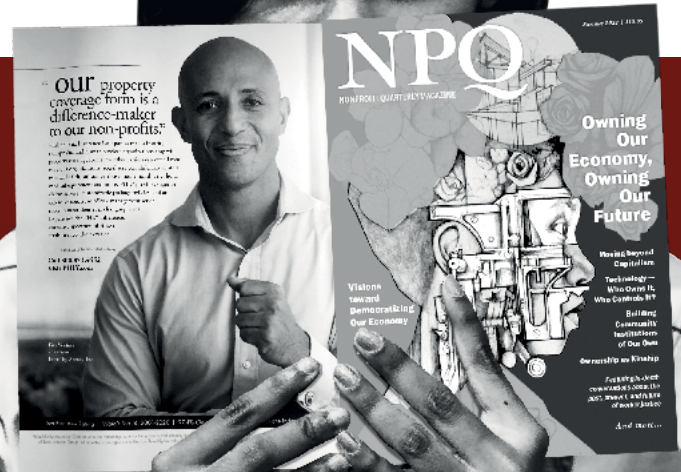


Enjoying This Magazine?

NPQ's Leading Edge
Membership includes access to
a digital archive of magazine
issues dating back to 2007.

Scan the QR code to
learn more about our
member benefits.

SCAN ME



“I think that in education, we tend to be in silos. Particularly as a high school teacher and a college teacher, everything is about a course or your content area, and there’s really not a lot of interdisciplinary work or integration, right? So I try to think about everything that is taught in school as a *literacy*.”



YSR: Yes, yes, yes. Thank you for that validation. Because we have to trust our bodies.

CS: Well, it’s really interesting to hear, because everything that you said resonates. And I think that part of what I’m looking to deal with this next year is to explore how Black women can be authentic in leadership, and how we are being authentic in leadership, and how to create a new narrative about it.

YSR: There is a scholar and professor, Sondra Perl, who wrote about “felt sense.”⁸ She wrote in the area of composition and rhetoric. I used to use her work in my class on writing nonfiction. I would get students to engage with touching. For example, foods they grew up with. I would ask them to bring those foods to class, to touch the food, write memories around the food. So when you touch that mango, for example, what is the sensorial effect that it has in the body, and then what can come out of that? What you were just saying reminded me of Perl’s work on felt sense, and how that seemed to be such a foreign concept in the field of composition and rhetoric when it came out—and it became such a big idea. She really had a run with her work in the ’80s and ’90s, because no one had talked about writing in the way she did. And now, in the field that I’m in, for the last five or six years people have been talking about *embodied literacies*.

CS: That’s amazing. I love to hear you using the term *literacies*. Can you say a little bit about that? It seems like it’s a term that describes different ways of being.

YSR: Thank you for saying that. I think that in education, we tend to be in silos. Particularly as a high school teacher and a college teacher, everything is about a course or your content area, and there’s really not a lot of interdisciplinary work or integration, right? So I try to think about everything that is taught in school as a *literacy*. And there are multiple literacies. Healing-centered education? That’s a literacy—there’s a language, there’s a way of being around that. Math is a

literacy, English—language arts—is a literacy, science is a literacy, critical thinking is a literacy. If we look at it this way, as I do, we’re trying to become literate beings. Being literate means that there’s some understanding. There’s also some practice to it; it’s not just theoretical.

So, it just seems more open to me to look at it like this. And it’s not hierarchical. Because you know, in the academy, including in K–12, we want to prioritize math and science and put it above English, above art—especially above the arts. But the arts remind us that we’re human! And yet it’s math and science that we want to prioritize and sell as a bill of goods to kids. As in, “If you’re a great mathematician or scientist, then you can make a lot of money, you can advance the world.” When we really look at it, though, art has always allowed us to have difficult conversations, has always advanced understanding. People turn to artists. James Baldwin said that it was the artist’s responsibility to make commentary on the world. I want equality among the literacies!

CS: I love that. When you were saying that, it’s exactly what I was thinking about. I imagine literacy as a different concept that allows us to move through all these forms and not get caught up—because there are social developmental aspects of that, and there are people who are teachers, and in the literacies, it’s almost like a weaving through. That’s what I’m getting from this. You talked about racial literacy. And you don’t call it this, but also love as a literacy. Everything you’re saying now makes me think we need a part two to this conversation.

YSR: I love it. I’m so grateful for your brain, for your heart, for your creativity, your way of being. I see you, and I honor you, and I want to learn from you. And yes, love is a literacy, like everything else. And we especially need this literacy in schools—because part of the crisis is that the children are not being loved the way teachers would love their biological or foster children. And I’ve seen love manifest through

“White supremacy and racism are the status quo that creates fear, hierarchy, inhumanity, and all of those things that people hold on to unless they do the self-work and dislodge themselves from it.”

curriculum—a curriculum that invites kids to learn about their own identity, to learn about from whence they came, to (as the writer and professor Robin Kelley would say) “freedom dream” a world for themselves.⁹ That is a curriculum of love, a curriculum of human flourishing—because ultimately, school is for bringing people out of darkness into light and hopefully creating the global citizenry that we want. So you cannot have a disdain or distaste or disrespect for those children if they’re going to flourish.

And that’s why I say *critical love*, because I know not everyone’s gonna be, “Oh, I love you like I love my son!” But if there’s a critical love, a profound and ethical commitment to children—that kind of love? If you know that it is an ethical commitment to offer them a particular education that will

allow them to flourish? Then love them that way. And that is not the love that we see, Cyndi, in schools. There is no ethical commitment to children. Not writ large, for the most part. Because White supremacy and racism are the status quo that creates fear, hierarchy, inhumanity, and all of those things that people hold on to unless they do the self-work and dislodge themselves from it.

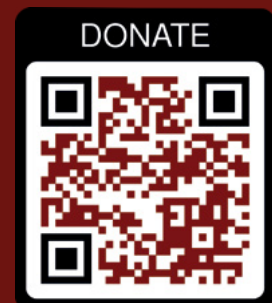
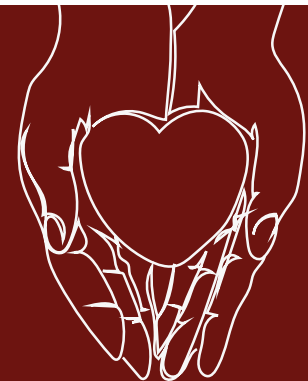
CS: I would actually say that it’s not just schools. I think I would even say it’s social change work. I would say we’re at a critical point where we’re trying to build in a society based on fighting and based on a culture of aggression. And that’s not how we build it. So I would say a literacy of love is very critical.

YSR: Yes!



NPQ needs your support.

As a nonprofit organization, NPQ relies on supporter contributions. We invite you to support our efforts to foster an active, engaged, and sometimes disruptive civil sector.





Check out NPQ's Special Collections.

Our Special Collections are curated to bring together themes grounded in human rights, economic and social justice, racial equity, and thriving communities.



Scan the QR Code
to view our Special
Collections!

VIEW COLLECTIONS



CS: It's so funny that you're saying this, because I'm contributing an article on love for this edition of the magazine. bell hooks talks about Erich Fromm's book *The Art of Loving*, in her talk on love.¹⁰ And when I read his book, I saw that he offers a framework for love. Not romantic love, but the kind of ethical love that you're talking about.

YSR: I need that book. Thank you for that. I will be ordering that and your book. Thank you for teaching me. Thank you for this time, Cyndi. I'm better for it—better in the sense that my synapses are sparking!

CS: Me, too! I feel the same way. After I met you, I said, "What is it about her?" It's that you just come with this heart and this love. So thank you for embodying that, because it's not common, and I really appreciate that.

YSR: Cyndi, I appreciate you. And let me just end with the gratitude that I have for this interview and for your interest.

NOTES

1. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, "Truth, Love, & Racial Literacy," TEDxPenn Talk, September 15, 2022, YouTube video, 15:02, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-V_GdpVR6NI; and see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972).
2. Ella L. J. Bell Smith and Stella M. Nkomo, *Our Separate Ways: Black and White Women and the Struggle for Professional Identity* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2001).
3. Wendi S. Williams, *She (Been) Ready! The Podcast*, open.spotify.com/show/3n90qZ06OG0UHbFHZz2UNY; and Wendi S. Williams, *Black Women at Work: On Refusal and Recovery* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2023).
4. Cyndi Suarez, "Leadership Is Voice," *Nonprofit Quarterly Magazine* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2023): 90–95.
5. See the work of Dr. Angel Acosta and the Acosta Institute, www.drangelacosta.com.
6. See Cyndi Suarez, *The Power Manual: How to Master Complex Power Dynamics* (Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2018).
7. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, *Love from the Vortex & Other Poems* (Kaleidoscope Vibrations, LLC, 2020).
8. Sondra Perl, *Felt Sense: Writing with the Body* (London, UK: Heinemann, 2004).
9. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).
10. bell hooks, *All about Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 2000); and Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 50th anniversary ed. (1956; repr., New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006).

To comment on this article, write to us at feedback@npqmag.org. Order reprints from <http://store.nonprofitquarterly.org>.

AI FOR NONPROFITS: THE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO ENHANCING FUNDRAISING COMMUNICATIONS

Our free guide explores how you can use AI tools to support your mission (and beneficiaries) with abundance!



DOWNLOAD NOW!



donorperfect.com/ai-guide

Calling People *Forward* Instead of *Out*: Ten Essential Steps

by Justin Michael Williams and Shelly Tygielski

■
With all of these tools in your possession, you are well equipped to take greater responsibility, make the vision of ending racism a reality, and play a bigger game. Our culture's immune system needs healthy cells that can transform these moments into something greater. *Be the one who takes the conversation to a new level.*

This article was excerpted from How We Ended Racism: Realizing a New Possibility in One Generation, by Justin Michael Williams and Shelly Tygielski (Sounds True, 2023), with permission. It has been lightly edited for publication here.

An essential conversational skill is knowing the difference between *calling forward* and *calling out*. Standing in the future, we can look back and see that one of the things we had to collectively affirm is that *we are done with calling people out*. Calling out leads to cancel culture; cancel culture is ineffective and divides us further. Today we have to commit to graduating beyond that perspective to move in the direction of our vision, so we can stop *fighting against* racism and finally *end racism*. This article will help you learn how to have big conversations when you see or experience someone acting from a state that is causing harm.



*You can call anyone forward, but
it doesn't mean they're going to
immediately walk toward you.*

*Remember, they may not have
the tools yet to do so.*



First, let's make some distinctions. In today's culture, *calling out* means publicly naming a wrong, an infraction, or a mistake; *calling in* means naming it privately. The problem with either approach is that both typically get infused with shame, blame, and guilt. It's well documented in studies in the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and even neuroscience that **shaming, blaming, and guilt** **someone shuts down the center of their brain responsible for learning and growth**. Thus, regardless of how much a person meditates or prays, or how emotionally or spiritually evolved they believe they are, if you use the tactics of shame, blame, and guilt, it blocks the ability for the person you are speaking with to actively listen, it stunts the capacity for them to learn, and it eliminates any opportunity for growth. We've all experienced this resistance. Think of the last time your partner or a family member said something that triggered you. Regardless of how "right" or "rational" they were, once you were activated by shame, blame, or guilt, all bets were off—you likely ended up *reacting*.

You can usually only come back to the same conversation and see things more clearly after having some time to "cool off," because your brain has had a chance to regulate. After regulation, we hear things differently; we can see the other side of a perspective and think from a logical place that is responsive rather than reactive. In our movement to end racism, we must not use shame, blame, or guilt—*no matter what*. Yes, we really mean *no matter what*. No matter how horrific you think the circumstance is, if you want the situation to transform, then shame, blame, and guilt are off the table.

Here are two questions you can ask yourself as a litmus test prior to having a difficult conversation: Do I want to "be

heard" or do I want to *be effective*? Do I want to create a bridge or widen the divide? Prior to each interaction, you must be brutally honest with yourself about your true intentions because they will impact the outcome of the conversation dramatically. If you are not ready to show up to the conversation without shame, blame, and guilt, you might want to reconsider speaking at all. To end racism, we must use our language to move us in the direction of our vision.

Another part of "calling out" and "calling in" that is rarely discussed is the fact that both of these acts presuppose that the person who is doing the "calling in" or the "calling out" is right: that the person using these tactics is morally superior and that they have the authority to correct another person. This is precisely the reason that we need to be grounded in truth and commit to understanding the difference between stories and facts. **If you think your story is "the truth," then it leaves no room for understanding, discussion, or conversation.** It is binary thinking all over again, requiring the person you are disagreeing with to immediately conform to your thinking and behavior.

Calling forward is a model of communication that we coined several years ago that flips the idea of "calling out" and "calling in" on its head, turning it into something more effective for bringing people together and ending racism. While "calling out" or "calling in" is fighting against what someone did wrong, *calling forward* is an invitation to be *something greater*. While calling out/in is fighting against what we hate, *calling forward* is building upon what we love. *Calling forward* is inviting people into a greater state of integration and evolution. *Calling forward* opens the door to real transformation, and we've found that the outcome—although not always immediate—is often surprising.

You can call anyone forward, but it doesn't mean they're going to immediately walk toward you. Remember, they may not have the tools yet to do so. When using the model we are about to share, often an opening happens where there once was none.

Use the "Ten Essential Steps to Calling Forward" the next time you need to have a difficult conversation—specifically, when you want to address someone having contributed to



the perpetuation of prejudice, discrimination, racism, or othering. Stand in the center of what you believe: that racism can and will end, and that you yourself have the power to end it. Calling forward is a skill we all have the capacity to learn. *It starts with you.*

THE TEN ESSENTIAL STEPS TO CALLING FORWARD

As with any conversation, you don't have control of what the other person does or says, but *you do have control over yourself—how you choose to respond and how you show up.* These ten steps will prepare you for the best possible outcome. Read the ten steps first, then put them into action using the script.

Step 1: Center in Your Vision

Calling forward is, more than anything, *an invitation to something greater.* But you can't invite someone forward if you have no idea where forward is or what you are moving toward. It's important to always know what you are moving toward before you set off on your journey—that is what the collective vision of ending racism is for. That is the finish line. You can ask yourself a few questions while clarifying what you are moving toward: What type of world do I want to live in and how do people in the world treat one another? What *values* are central to this world? What do I see as possible in a world without racism? Before you have any conversations, you must remember that the highest possible outcome is that the other person not only sees and acknowledges the mistake they made and harm they caused but also joins you in an elevated state of consciousness. You must approach this conversation from a place of *inviting them forward into something you love*, not just as an opportunity to call out/in what they did wrong.

Stand in the future, orient yourself toward the vision of the world you want to (co)create, and choose your actions based upon what in the future you would do. **If you were standing in the future, where your vision had come true and the person you are going to be speaking with is a part of your vision, how would you handle the conversation and speak in way that took you forward toward that vision?**

You can ask yourself a few questions while clarifying what you are moving toward:

What type of world do I want to live in and how do people in the world treat one another?

What values are central to this world?

(That's why it's called *calling forward*.) Anchor into this deeply before the conversation even begins. This is key. Otherwise, you risk being on the attack from the first sentence.

Step 2: Drop Your Stories

This is hard for many people, because we believe so deeply in the assessments and stories we've made up in our heads about people and situations that we don't leave space for anyone to show up differently.

We shut the door before they even round the corner. Our stories can block opportunities for connection, because we become convinced that the preconceived stories we've made up in our heads about a person are true before the conversation even begins. If you don't drop your stories, the conversation is doomed from the start.

Remember that we tend to default to assessment-making. Thinking things like "I can't trust her," "He isn't the brightest person," "This isn't going to go well," or "People of that gender always do this" is something that we are hardwired to do. Pause before the conversation starts and get clear on the assessments that are going on in your mind. Those assessments may hinder the success of the conversation. Ask yourself, "What are the stories I'm making up, and what are the facts?"

Remaining committed to understanding the origins of our assessments can ground us in a space that staves off

Every calling forward conversation

must begin with the words

“I feel...” If you start the conversation with “You...”

then you’re already down a path

to shame, blame, and guilt.



reactivity and allows us to be responsible for our biases and beliefs about how things “should” be. **You may not get rid of all of your biases, but you can be responsible for them so they don’t control you.**

Step 3: **Imagine That This Person’s Actions Were Coming from a Place of Care, Concern, and Love**

Even if the person you are speaking with did something you believe is wrong, you cannot approach the conversation from a place of their being a “bad person.” If you do, you’ll immediately begin with shame and blame, and only speak to and activate the place within them that causes harm.

Every person has within them the capacity for “good” and “bad.” You want to prepare yourself to speak to the best part of a person and call that best part of them forward.

You do this by trying to imagine yourself in their shoes. This can be incredibly difficult, but here’s a trick: Ask yourself, “If I forced myself to assume this person’s actions were coming from a place of care, concern, and love, then why might they have done what they’ve done?” Most people are not intentionally trying to cause harm. Either way, however, for the purposes of this step, it doesn’t really matter. This step of the process is to *prepare you to show up for the conversation* as open, grounded, and clear as possible. This step is an essential part of that process.

Step 4: **Prepare the Space**

Preparing for difficult conversations is like planning a dinner party. **It is not acceptable to invite your guests at the last minute to your fancy dinner party and expect them to show**

up ready to meet your expectations. You must invite people ahead of time, prepare the menu and food, and set the table. You prepare the space. So, too, must we prepare the space for difficult conversations. Often, we’ve spent hours or even days ruminating and preparing ourselves to have a difficult conversation without giving the other person the opportunity to do the same—often springing the conversation upon the other person without giving them a chance to *prepare to listen*. Getting unexpected feedback is hard for all of us. You may have spent hours mustering up the courage to call someone on the phone, finally ready to spill your heart out, while they may be walking through the grocery store or just getting off of a really tough call with their boss. They may be unable to access their heart to listen to you at that time.

A simple way to solve this is by sending the person a message or giving them more than a moment’s notice that you want to have a conversation about something important. A message saying, “Hey, I’d love to talk to you about something important. Can you chat after work?” or “Do you have the capacity and space to have a discussion at the moment? It’s about something a little sensitive” makes a world of difference. If the wrongdoing happens in the heat of the moment—for example, during a meeting with other individuals—you might say, “After the meeting is over, I’d love to speak with you about this for a few minutes.” More often than not, this is better than letting your emotions take over and flipping out in the middle of the meeting. The primary reason you are doing this is so that when you are ready to speak with that person, they are as ready as they can be to listen. You are inviting them into a conversation.

Step 5: **Own Your Feelings**

Every *calling forward* conversation must begin with the words “I feel...” If you start the conversation with “You...” then you’re already down a path to shame, blame, and guilt. When someone or something hurts us, the way we respond is no one else’s choice or fault but our own. Regardless of what another person says or does, you own (and are responsible for) your reaction.

In these types of conversations, own and name the truth of your emotions first and foremost, and share those



*Creating connection
and compassion
starts with you being*

*vulnerable. Vulnerability is
not weakness—it's your greatest
strength, especially in these
kinds of conversations.*

emotions with the person you're speaking with. For example, "I felt hurt and insignificant after the conversation that just happened in the boardroom, and I want to share how affected I am by this." Notice the word *you* isn't in that sentence at all. *Calling forward* starts with *yourself*, not the other person.

Step 6: **Create a Space of Connection and Compassion**

Creating connection and compassion starts with you being vulnerable. Vulnerability is not weakness—it's your greatest strength, especially in these kinds of conversations. How do you build a space of vulnerability and connection? You begin with sharing your emotions. This is why Step 5 ("Own Your Feelings") is so important. As soon as you open your heart and allow yourself to be seen emotionally, a space of compassion and vulnerability can be created. For transformation to occur in the most effective way, connection and compassion *must* be cultivated. Remember, it's unlikely that the person you're speaking with will know these steps. Therefore, *you are responsible* for creating and holding the space of compassion yourself and inviting them to meet you there. The person you are speaking to may not accept your invitation, but the possibility of their accepting it will never happen if you don't extend the invitation to begin with. As the author and photographer Doe Zantamata once offered, "It's easy to judge. It's more difficult to understand. Understanding requires compassion, patience, and a willingness to believe that good hearts sometimes choose poor methods."¹ **Judgment leads to separation. Understanding leads to transformation.**

Step 7: **Paint the Picture of the Vision**

Imagine trying to invite someone to a beautiful vacation on a tropical island but only showing them pictures of a volcano erupting or crime, destruction, and violence among the locals. This is what many of us do when we call someone out/in. **Don't focus the bulk of the conversation on everything they did "wrong." Instead, describe the world they could be living in with you if they chose different actions.** Remember, we must remain committed to moving toward solutions rather than continuing to identify and analyze issues. Be specific in your descriptors. Paint a picture of

what kind of things we would see in that world. How would people feel? What do you value in your vision?

An example would be: "Uncle Dan, it feels so exciting to me to imagine a world where everyone is safe enough to know that they can love who they want without restriction or fear. Where they can walk down the street and go into any restaurant and feel safe and accepted. Think about your grandkids—I know how much you love them. I have witnessed the way you deeply care for and love them. Wouldn't you want everyone to treat them that way, even if they made a choice to love someone different from what's considered status quo? I'm committed to making the world a kinder place, for us now and for our children." Remember, you're *inviting them in*. A part (if not most) of your conversation with this person should be painting the picture of the future you're inviting them into.

Step 8: **Don't Wait Until It's Too Late**

This is big. Most of us wait too long to have these conversations. By the time we do, we're so filled with resentment and fear that we couldn't find compassion even if we tried. **When you notice that something has become a problem for you, don't wait until it happens again to bring it up. Avoidance and denial only make things more difficult later.** Have the conversation early, before the problem gets too big to handle later or before the other person has long passed.

Step 9: **Don't Arrive with All the Solutions**

We often approach these types of conversations with a

“Our specialty is that non-profit educational space. PHLY makes us better at it.”



Michael R. Jakob
Principal
Carriage Trade
Insurance Agency, Inc.

Philadelphia Insurance Companies provides specialized, innovative protection to educational institutions in the non-profit and human services space. Coverages include private, academic, religious, vocational and charter schools. PHLY offers separate limits for General Liability, Educators Professional and Cyber Liability, Abuse & Molestation. Learn more. Experience the PHLY difference.



PHILADELPHIA
INSURANCE COMPANIES

A Member of the Tokio Marine Group

Call 800.873.4552
Visit PHLY.com

Philadelphia Insurance Companies is the marketing name for the property and casualty insurance operations of Philadelphia Consolidated Holding Corp., a member of Tokio Marine Group. All admitted coverages are written by Philadelphia Indemnity Insurance Company. Coverages are subject to actual policy language.

premeditated idea of what we'd like the outcome to be, leaving no space for collaborative inquiry. **If someone says or does something wrong, and you are hoping they rectify or fix it, the best solutions arise when both parties can explore ideas for solutions together.** Otherwise, the person you're speaking with will feel like something is being *forced* upon them or that you are the moral cop—and that never works in the long run. It often ignites the pattern of shame, blame, and guilt. Forcing your solution onto a person or trying to elicit an action that they aren't authentically on board with leads to empty actions. We're playing a bigger game here. We're going for *transformation*—and that requires remaining open to the possibility that *there are many different doorways into the future you desire, not just one.*

Step 10: **Don't Attach Yourself to a Specific Outcome**

Sometimes, even after your best efforts, the person you are speaking with is unwilling or not ready to listen. That should not deter you from standing in your truth, oriented toward a collective vision and remaining firm in what you believe in. **Think about all the times you've had to learn a lesson over and over again before you finally "got it."** Give the person that same measure of grace. We know this can be hard to do when it appears that the person is causing harm. Like a flow of water slowly but consistently carving stone, you never know which conversation is going to forge a new path forward. If you hold a space of compassion, care, and love, the person *may at least hear you*. It's not up to you how quickly they transform; it is, however, up to you to create a space where transformation is likely to occur based upon the energy you bring to the conversation. Sometimes people will surprise you. Sometimes they will disappoint you. None of that is up to you. Release yourself from having to control it.



You may notice that the “Ten Essential Steps to Calling Forward” are more about *you* than they are about another person. That's because you cannot take responsibility for what anyone else does, but you can *prepare yourself*. As a beacon of the end of racism, you are responsible for lighting the path for others, regardless of whether or not someone chooses to walk it with you.

You might be wondering what happens when someone tries to call *you* out, in, or forward for something you've done wrong. All the same steps apply. You get to show up as someone who is practiced and skilled at having these conversations, so that when shame, blame, or guilt arrive in your presence, they get transformed into something greater. Don't fall into the trap of people thinking they have the right or permission to use harmful tactics, even if you are the one who has caused harm. With all of these tools in your possession, you are well equipped to take greater responsibility, make the vision of ending racism a reality, and play a bigger game. Our culture's immune system needs healthy cells that can transform these moments into something greater. *Be the one who takes the conversation to a new level.*

NOTE

1. Doe Zantamata, "It's Easy to Judge...", *Happiness in Your Life* (blog), October 13, 2020, www.thehiyl.com/2020/10/its-easy-to-judge.html.

JUSTIN MICHAEL WILLIAMS is an award-winning author, transformational speaker, and Grammy-nominated recording artist who has been featured by Grammy.com, Yoga Journal, Billboard.com, Wanderlust, and SXSW. He is also a Black, queer millennial. With over a decade of teaching experience, Williams has become a pioneering voice for diversity and inclusion. Williams is coauthor, with Shelly Tygielski, of *How We Ended Racism: Realizing a New Possibility in One Generation* (Sounds True, 2023). **SHELLY TYGIELSKI** is the founder of the global, grassroots mutual aid organization Pandemic of Love, soon to be the subject of a TV series, *All Hands on Deck*. A CNN Hero, Tygielski is working on the docuseries *The Beat Goes On*, about the Martin Luther King family, airing January 2025. A trauma-informed mindfulness teacher and Garrison Institute Fellow, Tygielski is currently pursuing a doctorate in philanthropic leadership from Indiana University. Her latest book, coauthored with Justin Michael Williams, *How We Ended Racism: Realizing a New Possibility in One Generation* (Sounds True, 2023), was born out of a science-based curriculum.

To comment on this article, write to us at feedback@npqmag.org. Order reprints from <http://store.nonprofitquarterly.org>.

NP

Leading Edge: A Program for Equity-Centered Leaders

- Access to monthly learning events with live Q&A
- Exclusive access to hours of online education and discussions
- Digital subscription to *Nonprofit Quarterly*
- Unlimited access to 16,000 searchable PDF articles

All for
\$199
a year!

SCAN ME



Scan the QR Code to
become a member today!

Hope Is a Practice and a Discipline: Building a Path to a Counterculture of Care

by *Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba*

■
We are wading through hell and high water, tasked with dreaming new worlds into being while the worlds we have known fall down around us. Here, on the edge of everything, the work of cultivating hope and purpose, of anchoring people to one another, is as important now as it has ever been, at any time in human history—because without those efforts, we would be lost in the dark.

This article was excerpted from Let This Radicalize You: Organizing and the Revolution of Reciprocal Care by Kelly Hayes and Mariame Kaba (Haymarket Books, 2023), with permission. It has been lightly edited for publication here.

W

hen someone we love faces a difficult diagnosis or our community is hit by disaster, we come to more deeply understand the value of time and care. If we discover that we may have less time with someone than we had hoped, time does not become pointless or less meaningful; it becomes more precious. When our communities experience disaster, we understand that care and rescue efforts are essential, even if some loss is inevitable. In those moments, we know that care matters and that trying matters, come what may. It may be difficult for some people to imagine extending such sentiments to the larger world we live in, and to all of our relations, but it is possible.

Sometimes we expect the energy and feelings that we need in order to build movements amid crisis to flow naturally as though they were embedded in our personalities. That is the influence of individualism. Just as patience is a practice, rather than a feeling, hope and grief are not simply things we feel but things we enact in the world.



To practice active hope, we do not need to believe that everything will work out in the end. We need only decide who we are choosing to be and how we are choosing to function.

When we enact grief with intention, and in concert with other people, we can find and create moments of relief, comfort, and even joy—and those moments can sustain us. As Malkia Devich-Cyril writes, “Becoming aware of grief gives us more choices about how to respond to grief and opens up possibilities to approach grief not only with compassion for self and others, but also with joy. Joy is not the opposite of grief. Grief is the opposite of indifference.”¹

Hope, too, requires us to reject indifference. And like any indifference-rejecting phenomenon, it demands effort in order to thrive. When we talk about hope in these times, we are not prescribing optimism. Rather, we are talking about a practice and a discipline—what Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone have termed “Active Hope.” As Macy and Johnstone write,

Active Hope is a practice. Like tai chi or gardening, it is something we do rather than have. It is a process we can apply to any situation, and it involves three key steps. First, we take a clear view of reality; second, we identify what we hope for in terms of the direction we’d like things to move in or the values we’d like to see expressed; and third, we take steps to move ourselves or our situation in that direction. Since Active Hope doesn’t require our optimism, we can apply it even in areas where we feel hopeless. The guiding impetus is intention; we choose what we aim to bring about, act for, or express. Rather than weighing our chances and proceeding only when we feel hopeful, we focus on our intention and let it be our guide.²

This practice of hope allows us to remain creative and strategic. It does not require us to deny the severity of our situation or detract from our practice of grief. To practice active hope, we do not need to believe that everything will work out in the end. We need only decide who we are choosing to be and how we are choosing to function in relation to the outcome we desire, and abide by what those decisions demand of us.

This practice of hope does not guarantee any victories against long odds, but it does make those victories more possible. Hope, therefore, is not only a source of comfort to the afflicted but also a strategic imperative.

PRACTICE SPACES

It follows that if we believe having a practice of hope and a practice of grief are important for organizers and movement work, we should be creating spaces and opportunities for this work to occur. As we move forward, we must ask ourselves, Are we making space for grief in our organizing work? Are we talking about the practice of hope, and how we can orient ourselves in these daunting times?

What would making room for grief in your spaces look like? Some groups with a physical space might have “altar hours,” when members can visit the group’s altar to grieve for COVID victims or victims of any struggle. These could also be art-making hours, with craft supplies for people to add decorative commemorations. Making art and preserving stories are essential, particularly in this era of overnight erasure, when atrocities are washed away in a single news cycle. Grief spaces can provide opportunities for people to create and to hold space together and talk, or they can simply allow people to experience grief in a place where their love, their loss, and their continued existence are held sacred.

In Octavia Butler’s novel *The Parable of the Sower*, characters who had previously been deprived of the opportunity to memorialize lost loved ones buried acorns together, to lay their memories to rest and create new life in their honor. Similarly, in our times, memorial gardens for victims of COVID-19, or whatever loss a community is enduring, can create a therapeutic space while also providing a resource for the community. In Chicago, the radical Black youth-directed organization Assata’s Daughters dedicated its group’s garden to Takiya Holmes, an eleven-year-old member who was killed by a stray bullet in February 2017. In July 2022, the Chicago-based groups Love & Protect and Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project invited community members to contribute to the creation of a “seed quilt”—a

We must also create practice space for hope.

Our movements cannot be echo chambers of doom.



biodegradable quilt that will disintegrate into the ground as the seeds embedded within it take root. Even as participants stitched together squares to create this symbol of hope, they memorialized formerly incarcerated loved ones who were recently lost. The quilt will be installed outside Logan Correctional Center in Logan County, Illinois, as a symbol of the work of prison abolition, which requires us to counter death-making institutions with life-giving efforts.

Memorials can also be biting and disruptive, and that, too, can be a source of healing for participants. As politicians and corporations push us to accept a society that does not grieve mass death, our grief and stories of the dead can function as resistance. Dirges should drown out their speeches. Pop-up memorials should force them to reconfigure their events. From guerrilla art to direct actions, such as die-ins, where people use their own bodies to memorialize the dead, our practices of grief should overwhelm normalcy's narratives and imagery. A multilayered community memorial, for example, could draw connections between the forces causing so much death while disrupting a violent cycle of forgetting. Hundreds of memorial messages could be wheat-pasted throughout a city overnight. People could spontaneously disrupt events that erase or perpetuate deaths with poems, prayers, or songs. Acts of rebellious grief can take many shapes, but all are a rejection of mass death and an insistence on the humanity of those who have passed.

We must also create practice space for hope. Our movements cannot be echo chambers of doom. When the news cycle is depleting us or members are worn down by loss or defeat, we should acknowledge this and engage in conversations, activities, and exercises that help us reorient ourselves. Cynicism is a creeping enemy. We must actively evade it. From group dialogues to artistic exercises and direct actions, we must create space for renewal and recommitment.

Sometimes the practice of hope takes the form of mutual aid. In her essay "Dust of the Desert," Lee Sandusky writes

of grief, struggle, and mutual aid in the Sonoran Desert, where thousands of migrants have died while attempting to cross the US-Mexico border. Sandusky notes that the dead go uncounted, unidentified, and, at least half the time, ungathered. Sandusky organizes with No More Deaths, a group that provides mutual aid to border crossers, many of whom are in distress. She and her co-strugglers also go on search missions for people lost in the desert and leave jugs of water for thirsty migrants to find. "The desert landscape is littered with thousands of black jugs carried from the south and clear gallons graffitied with well wishes brought from the north," writes Sandusky.³

Some of the jugs are slashed open by US Border Patrol agents. Some are found by people in need. By leaving jugs of water, mutual aid workers in the borderlands hold hope and grief simultaneously. Some of the jugs they scatter will alleviate suffering or even save lives, while others will become "plastic memorial stones for those who don't make it." But as Sandusky writes, "Border work is predicated on ending the deaths of those crossing—currently an insurmountable task—and much of the action we take is in response to grief, but also anger and hope; the three are inseparable motivations that sustain organizing and action within our community."⁴

How does your community practice hope and grief in collectivity? Are such efforts planned intentionally? For example, has your group created any space, physical or otherwise, for people to process their hope or grief about the pandemic?

One exercise that might allow for the practice of hope and grief simultaneously could be the creation of a memorial time capsule. Members of your group could write messages, detailing what they think activists one hundred years from now should understand about the moment we are living in, and what losses were being erased. This activity might not sound subversive or hopeful, but as it assumes the existence of activists a hundred years from now, there is hope embedded in the activity's basic premise. Even as we fear environmental catastrophe, we can prepare messages for

[A]ctions that help us remain whole, that prevent us from going numb, and that bring us into political communion with other people will be necessary to build a counterculture of care in this precarious era.

the activists of the future—asserting their existence in order to help make it so.

This is also a time to cherish poetry, which has always played an important role in fueling hope and making space for grief in movements. Poetry, like prayer, can provide a sense of communion—a joint hope, plea, or promise projected onto the world. Our movements are rich in poems, and we should embrace their anchoring power, incorporating poetry into actions, meetings, and events, dedicated with the specificity that groups see fit. The system we are raging against erodes our compassion and confines our imaginations. In the face of such violence, poetry is a fitting weapon. We should wield it often.

Some will consider these actions insufficiently political. It's true that memorializations alone can sometimes be politically timid. But actions that help us remain whole, that prevent us from going numb, and that bring us into political communion with other people will be necessary to build a

counterculture of care in this precarious era. You choose what you bring to a vigil that you plan. Created thoughtfully, vigils can introduce radical ideas, initiate relationships, foster solidarity, and build power while also fulfilling a fundamental, unmet need.

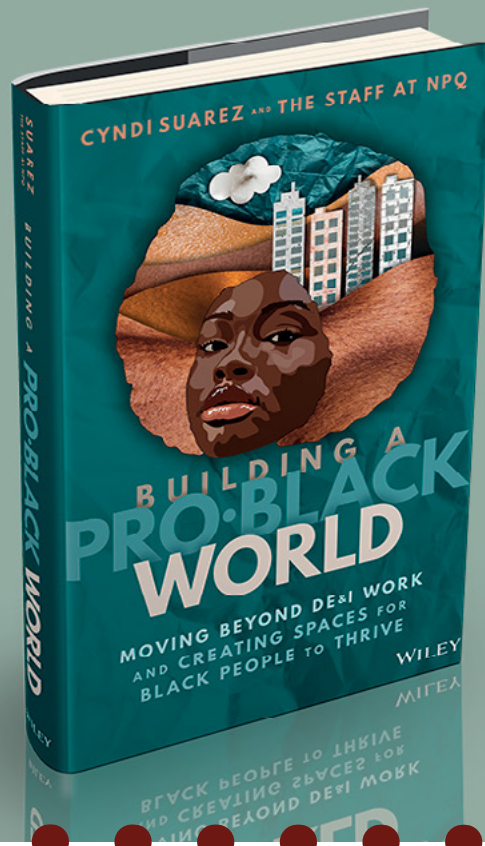
Regardless of how we choose to grieve or cultivate hope, we know we are living in disastrous times and that we will need one another. We are wading through hell and high water, tasked with dreaming new worlds into being while the worlds we have known fall down around us. Here, on the edge of everything, the work of cultivating hope and purpose, of anchoring people to one another, is as important now as it has ever been, at any time in human history—because without those efforts, we would be lost in the dark. As James Baldwin emphasized at the close of his book *Nothing Personal*, “The moment we cease to hold each other, the moment we break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out.”⁵

NOTES

1. Malkia Devich-Cyril, “Grief Belongs in Social Movements. Can We Embrace It?,” *In These Times*, July 28, 2021, inthesetimes.com/article/freedom-grief-healing-death-liberation-movements, excerpted from adrienne maree brown, *Holding Change: The Way of Emergent Strategy Facilitation and Mediation* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2021).
2. Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in with Unexpected Resilience & Creative Power* (rev. ed., Novato, CA: New World Library, 2022), 203.
3. Lee Sandusky, “Dust of the Desert,” in *Rebellious Mourning: The Collective Work of Grief*, ed. Cindy Milstein (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2017), 23.
4. *Ibid.*, 29.
5. Richard Avedon and James Baldwin, *Nothing Personal* (Cologne, Germany: Taschen, 2017), 49–50.

KELLY HAYES is a Menominee author, organizer, movement educator, and photographer. She is also the host of *Truthout's* podcast *Movement Memos*. Hayes is a cofounder of the Lifted Voices collective and the Chicago Light Brigade. **MARIAME KABA** is an organizer, educator, curator, and prison-industrial-complex abolitionist who is active in movements for racial, gender, and transformative justice. Kaba is the founder and director of Project NIA, a grassroots abolitionist organization with a vision to end youth incarceration, and is a researcher at Interrupting Criminalization, a project she cofounded with Andrea Ritchie in 2018.

To comment on this article, write to us at feedback@npqmag.org. Order reprints from <http://store.nonprofitquarterly.org>.



It's Here!

In *Building a Pro-Black World: Moving beyond DE&I Work and Creating Spaces for Black People to Thrive*, a team of dedicated nonprofit leaders delivers a timely roadmap to building pro-Black nonprofit organizations.

Moving the conversation beyond stale DEI clichés, Cyndi Suarez and the NPQ staff have included works from leading racial justice voices that demonstrate how to create an environment—and society—in which Black people can thrive.

Order yours using the QR codes!



Love as Social Order

by Cyndi Suarez

Love as orientation inspires us to move beyond thought and dogma. It is paradoxical, able to hold seemingly contradictory thoughts, which facilitates tolerance and sometimes leads to transformation. It is about overcoming separateness—the root of all human suffering.

H

ow do we build a world based in love? This is a critical question for social change agents. If we do not consider what drives our work, we may inadvertently be driven by fear or rage.

bell hooks may have been the first theorist to popularize the concept of a love ethic. However, she was influenced by Erich Fromm's book *The Art of Loving*.¹ In it, Fromm defines love as an orientation that shifts us from a focus on "being loved" to a practice of "creating love."² He writes,

Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an *attitude*, an *orientation of character* which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one "object" of love.³

Fromm explains that in Western civilization, love is a "rare phenomenon," and argues that in its place what we have is "pseudo-love," which he defines as the "disintegration of love," love that focuses on attachment, the quest to be loved.⁴ He calls this "neurotic love."⁵

Love as orientation inspires us to move beyond thought and dogma.⁶ It is paradoxical, able to hold seemingly contradictory thoughts, which facilitates tolerance and sometimes leads to transformation.⁷ It is about overcoming separateness—the root of all human suffering.⁸



“Those who are seriously concerned with love as the only rational answer to the problem of human existence must, then, arrive at the conclusion that important and radical changes in our social structure are necessary.”

—Erich Fromm

For Fromm, love as orientation is developmental. He writes,

It is hardly necessary to stress the fact that the ability to love as an act of giving depends on the character development of the person. It presupposes the attainment of a predominantly productive orientation; in this orientation the person has overcome dependency, narcissistic omnipotence, the wish to exploit others, or to hoard, and has acquired faith in his [sic] own human powers, courage to rely on his [sic] powers in the attainment of his [sic] goals. To the degree that these qualities are lacking, he [sic] is afraid of giving himself [sic]—hence of loving.

Beyond the element of giving, the active character of love becomes evident in the fact that it always implies certain basic elements, common to all forms of love. These are *care*, *responsibility*, *respect* and *knowledge*.⁹

Fromm then defines these four core elements in the context of love as an ethic:

- **Care** is “the active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love.”¹⁰
- **Responsibility** is the ability and readiness to respond.¹¹

Make a world of difference.

- Earn your Northwestern University master’s in Global Health part time and entirely online.
- Build skills essential for success in areas such as global health policy and systems, regulation, evaluation and measurement, business strategy, grant writing, and leadership.
- Develop the expertise needed to drive change and make positive impacts in resource-limited communities worldwide.
- Learn from industry experts and distinguished faculty from Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine’s Center for Global Health.

Apply today — applications are accepted quarterly.
sps.northwestern.edu/global • 312-503-2579

Northwestern | GLOBAL HEALTH
School of Professional Studies

■ **Respect** is “the ability to see a person as he [sic] is, to be aware of his [sic] unique individuality.”¹²

■ **Knowledge** is transcending one’s concern for the self to “see the other person in his [sic] own terms.”¹³ One “does not stay at the periphery, but penetrates to the core.”¹⁴

For Fromm, this kind of love “is not a resting place.”¹⁵ Rather, it “is a constant challenge”¹⁶ that requires faith. He observes, “Only the person who has faith in himself [sic] is able to be faithful to others.”¹⁷

The practice of love as an ethic requires three things.

The first is **discipline**.¹⁸ Like anything else, in order to become good at something, to become masterful, we must orient toward it repeatedly, not just when we’re in the mood.

Secondly, love requires **concentration**.¹⁹ We must guard ourselves from distraction. When we do become distracted, we must gently guide our mind back to an ethic and a practice of love. For Fromm, “To be concentrated in relation to others means primarily to be able to listen.”²⁰ It requires us to avoid conversations that are “trivial” and “not genuine.”²¹ It also calls on us “to avoid bad company,” which he defines as “people who are vicious and destructive;...zombies,...people whose soul is dead.”²² Fromm notes that this practice requires one “to be alone with oneself,”²³ to become “sensitive to oneself,”²⁴ to hold a “relaxed alertness,” open to “relevant changes” in oneself, sensitive to one’s mental processes.²⁵

Finally, love requires **patience**.²⁶ We cannot expect “quick results.”²⁷ He writes, “If one does not know that everything has its time, and wants to force things, then indeed one will never succeed in becoming concentrated—nor in the art of loving.”²⁸

Fromm warns us not to confuse love with fairness; we can respect the rights of others and yet not love them. He asks,

If our whole social and economic organization is based on each one seeking his [sic] own advantage, if it is governed by the principle of egotism tempered only by the ethical principle of fairness, how can one do business, how can one act within the framework of existing society and at the same time practice love?²⁹

And answers,

Those who are seriously concerned with love as the only rational answer to the problem of human existence must, then, arrive at the conclusion that important and radical changes in our social structure are necessary, if love is to become a social and not a highly individualistic, marginal phenomenon.³⁰

let's amplify our impact

Join us in activating
the power of the
social sector.

Engage with us through:

- COA Accreditation
- Consulting
- Engagement Packages
- Learning Solutions



learn more
social-current.org

NOTES

1. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 50th anniversary ed. (1956, repr., New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006).
2. Ibid., 37.
3. Ibid., 43.
4. Ibid., 77, 87.
5. Ibid., 87.
6. Ibid., 72, 74.
7. Ibid., 74.
8. Ibid., 9.
9. Ibid., 24.
10. Ibid., 25 (set in roman here; italicized in the original).
11. Ibid., 26.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 27.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 96.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 114.
18. Ibid., 100.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 105.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 103.
24. Ibid., 106 (set in roman here; italicized in the original).
25. Ibid., 107.
26. Ibid., 101.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 106.
29. Ibid., 120.
30. Ibid., 122.

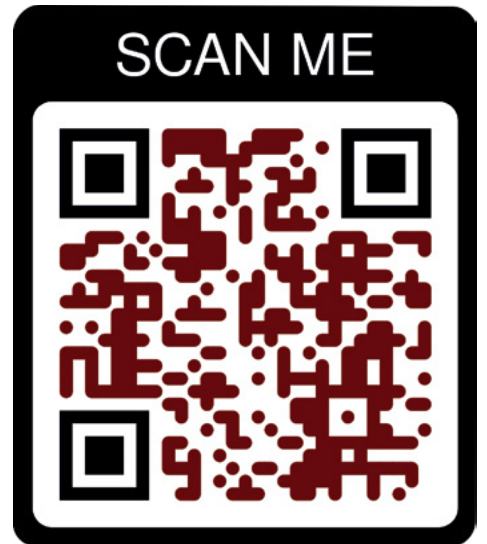
CYNDI SUAREZ is the *Nonprofit Quarterly's* president and editor in chief. She is author of *The Power Manual: How to Master Complex Power Dynamics* (New Society Publishers, 2018), in which she outlines a new theory and practice of power. Suarez has worked as a strategy and innovation consultant with a focus on networks and platforms for social movements. Her studies were in feminist theory and organizational development for social change.

To comment on this article, write to us at feedback@npqmag.org. Order reprints from <http://store.nonprofitquarterly.org>.



Interested in Our Webinars?

NPQ's Leading Edge Membership includes access to upcoming and on-demand webinars. Scan the QR code to learn more.



Upcoming Webinars

Live monthly educational online courses created for nonprofit leaders, capacity builders, and funders to tackle the current challenges and opportunities facing the nonprofit sector.

On-Demand Webinars

Gain access to our exclusive library of online courses led by top nonprofit thought leaders and educators providing contextualized information to help nonprofit practitioners understand and navigate the frequent shifts within the sector.

ЕНДРАРЕЯ





Free on-demand training for nonprofit professionals

Nonprofit Management Essentials is a series of free, on-demand videos for nonprofit professionals brought to you by the Kellogg School Center for Nonprofit Management and fully funded by The Allstate Foundation. Timely topics are added regularly. Explore our most recent videos on leadership, AI, impact and sales.

Whether you're an emerging leader or new to the sector, a novice board member or leader looking for training resources for your staff, we offer a learning experience designed to fit you and your schedule.

Choose how you learn

On-Demand — Pick a topic and jump in at any time. Available 24/7/365.

Online Connection — Eight weeks of facilitated learning with Kellogg faculty and peers.

DIY Facilitation — Everything you need to facilitate a cohort learning experience for your organization.

Register for your free nonprofit training at kell.gg/kxnpessentials

Northwestern | Kellogg

CENTER FOR
Nonprofit Management



Funded by The Allstate
Foundation

The PHLY *Difference*

“Our specialty is that non-profit educational space. PHLY makes us better at it.”

Philadelphia Insurance Companies provides specialized, innovative protection to educational institutions in the non-profit and human services space. Coverages include private, academic, religious, vocational and charter schools. PHLY offers separate limits for General Liability, Educators Professional and Cyber Liability, Abuse & Molestation. Learn more. Experience the PHLY difference.



PHILADELPHIA
INSURANCE COMPANIES

A Member of the Tokio Marine Group

Call **800.873.4552**
Visit **PHLY.com**

Michael R. Jakob
Principal
Carriage Trade
Insurance Agency, Inc.

AM Best A++ Rating | Ward's Top 50 2001-2022 | 95.7% Claims Satisfaction | 120+ Niche Industries

Philadelphia Insurance Companies is the marketing name for the property and casualty insurance operations of Philadelphia Consolidated Holding Corp., a member of Tokio Marine Group. All admitted coverages are written by Philadelphia Indemnity Insurance Company. Coverages are subject to actual policy language.