

June 16, 2020

STS Family,

I must confess that my heart has been heavy over the past several weeks after seeing the images and news stories regarding the violent, unnecessary deaths of Black Americans. As a wife and mother of three, it has taken me time to process the grief, despair, and fear due to the ongoing and tragic consequences of racism. However, I remain hopeful that the peaceful protests for racial justice by people of every age, race, religion, and status will result in action and change. Actions that move us towards unity of purpose in ending systemic racism and honoring the ideal of liberty and justice for all. While my faith is strong, we know that faith without works is dead.

For years STS has encouraged DMO leaders to take a seat at the table and actively engage in community and economic development efforts. Several weeks ago, I wrote about the importance of your leadership in helping our communities recover from the pandemic. Now, I must urge your leadership in another area. It is time for us all to take both leadership and action in advocating for changes to address systemic racism within the communities we serve. This action will not be easy nor comfortable, but we are experienced in addressing the difficult things to develop and promote tourism for the betterment of our communities.

Who better to lead efforts to show the way than us? We are experienced with using research to develop best practices and strategies; we develop campaigns to inspire community support and pride; we create and deliver programs to train local businesses on customer service and hospitality; and we market our destinations as diverse and welcoming to people from all over the world. So, if anyone can impact a change and leverage the benefits of a diverse and welcoming community, where all citizens have the opportunity to thrive, the tourism and hospitality industry can lead the way!

Here are 5 things that you can do now to get started:

- 1. Listen** - Listen to your Black friends, co-workers, and colleagues when discussing the current situation. *It will take both courage and humility to speak about how race has impacted the lives of Black Americans, regardless of our professional status. Listen to gain understanding, since effective communication is the key for bringing about any major change.*
- 2. Learn** - Seek out information on systemic racism and racial justice to prepare for discussions with friends and colleagues. *The STS team has compiled several resources for your reference on a new [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resources](#) page. Many Black Americans are processing and dealing with a range of emotions and trauma from the recent events which have reminded us of terrible events of the past. It would go a long way to have a productive conversation without having to explain the basics of the systemic issues.*

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3. **Lament** - Show empathy, care, and concern. *That can be a quick note to check-in, a text to let us know you are thinking of us, a call to say that you will assist with bringing about change, or a short prayer for protection and comfort.*
4. **Leverage** - Use your power, influence, position, and professional abilities to bring about needed changes in response to ongoing and systemic racism. *Start where you are--your office, local boards, church groups, civic organizations, book clubs, etc. In these groups and others, you can start the dialogue about how to make changes and address the issues of discrimination and social justice.*
5. **Love** - Stand with us to end discrimination and systemic racism, promote diversity and inclusion, and improve police and community relations in your city. *Love requires action.*

STS remains committed to a more diverse and inclusive association, in regards to our leadership, membership, and programming. That work has been underway, but there is still more to do. I am appreciative of the recent requests for additional resources and education, and the recommendations for new DEI programs. We will continue to use the pillars of **Education, Advocacy, Recognition** and **Networking** to do this important work to improve our association and communities--for visitors and citizens alike. It may not be easy, but together we can accomplish great things now and for the future.

Finally, I want to publicly thank those of you who have reached out during the past few weeks to check on me and the STS team. We appreciate both your care and concern. Feel free to share with me any questions, thoughts or resources on this topic, as I will prepare to share additional information in the coming weeks.

Take care.



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President & CEO