

Moving Towards New and Better

BY DR. TONY ALLEN

» In the midst of the unrelenting challenge created both by the COVID-19 pandemic and the nationwide multiracial movement toward social justice and equity, no one has the luxury of “business as usual.” In fact, there will not likely be an “as usual” for some time now. Our focus should be “new and better.” And that focus starts with us.

Effective methods of reducing the spread of COVID-19 are well-known if not politically contentious, but universally recognized mitigants for inequity and racism remain elusive. As Merck CEO Ken Frazier reminds us, the issue is not going away: “What the African American community sees in that videotape [of George Floyd’s murder] is that this African American man, who could be me or any other African American man, is being treated as less than human.”

People from varied backgrounds will bring different perspectives, fears, and aspirations to the table. Many white Americans find discussions about privilege unsettling, even threatening; some Black Americans are so scarred by their experiences that they must process their anger before they can begin moving forward with their colleagues. The language of the dialogue itself is charged and fraught with opportunities of misunderstanding and conflict. To do it and to do it well takes courage, consistency, and action that is uncharacteristic of the status quo.

If you are ready to engage with these things in mind, Bryan Stevenson (author of *Just Mercy*) provides four key ideas for moving forward. If you are not ready,



this one is not for you, but recognize that “new and better” is not going away.

Mr. Stevenson says, “First, we have to get approximate to the problems we care about.” Get out of your comfort zone to interact directly with the people being affected—students, prisoners, the homeless. Next, “Change the narrative,” which means challenging the language that insulates us from reality, as in how the term “super-predators” has been used to prosecute children as adults.

“We have to remain hopeful,” Stevenson insists. “Hope is what will make you stand when everyone else is sitting,” he says. “Hope is what will make you speak when everyone else is silent.” Finally, “We have to do uncomfortable things.” Stevenson speaks passionately of “communities of the broken,” and our shared responsibility both for their existence and their healing.

When I was in corporate America, particularly at MBNA America, I recall seeing this quote over every doorway in every one of its buildings around the

world: “Think of Yourself as a Customer.” Today, in my mind’s eye, that now reads, “Think of Yourself as Me – your brother, your sister, your son, your daughter, your friend ... and act accordingly.” I also recall the statement that “what gets measured gets attended to; what gets attended to gets done.” If you are a business leader, what social equity and fairness goals are you willing to quantify and measure every year, and how will you make sure the goals are met?

“New and better” demands courage, resolve, imagination, and passion, and we should demand the same of ourselves, our teams, and our organizations.



As president, **Dr. Tony Allen** is committed to a vision of making Delaware State University the most diverse, contemporary HBCU in America.