

From Support to Personal Action

By Danette Ross Watson, Chair
With members of the TAM Outreach Committee

Within the recent statement from our TAM Board, one comment stuck in my mind, “How we move forward from all this is a question many of us continue to wrestle with every day. We cannot make changes to laws or society overnight, but we can build a professional community where we pledge to support and care for each other while we stand up collectively for what we know to be right and just.”

I’m sure many of you have the same thought, and as the TAM Outreach Chair I thought this would be a good time to revisit our mission. Indeed, part of TAM’s mission as a 501(c)(3) is to educate. As stated in TAM’s mission statement: “TAM fosters the sharing of information and experience among its members.” Our goal with the TAM Statement is to honor our mission as we attempt to be peacemakers in this world.

Therefore, the Outreach Committee (OC) would like to discuss and share information and resources in an effort to educate the mediator community about race and how it affects our work and our profession.

TAM conferences have included many sessions about unconscious bias and cultural diversity, but perhaps as an Outreach Committee we also need to discuss issues such as systemic racism, healthcare inequality, and/or symbols of historical oppression, among other topics. The parties we serve in conflict may find themselves on different sides of these issues, and we are tasked with helping them find resolution. A deeper understanding of perceptions and experiences of these societal issues could make us better and more holistic mediators.

The TAM OC will strive to provide resources for continuing education for our members on a variety of topics that may be unfamiliar to some through listening to, and learning from, diverse voices and becoming a resource for conflict practitioners who are looking for ways to create change in their personal or professional lives.

While TAM cherishes our diversity, this is also time to address where there may be disparity. We need to understand all issues in conflict in order to assist with resolution for our parties. Some of us may also choose to take action in our personal lives for causes we personally believe in.

For example, if you chose to protest, initiated a town hall in your community, or facilitated a family dialogue regarding the issues at conflict in our society, consider sharing your stories and experiences with friends, family members, colleagues, and other TAM members.

As mediators, trainers and/or conflict management practitioners we are uniquely positioned to assist our society with engagement opportunities that may very well be riddled with conflict. We are the ones society should be looking to for help. Make yourself known to your community.

You may want to ask, “What can I do?”

Please note TAM as an organization does not endorse any of the organizations or suggestions listed below. These are suggestions from individual Outreach Committee members. Before you donate your personal time or money, it is always wise to do your own research, focusing on primary sources as much as possible, to fully understand an organization’s finances, founders, ideologies, funding sources, etc.

Here are some resources and ideas you might consider helpful on the topic of race in the United States:

Educate Yourself

- Colorofchange.org – Articles regarding racial injustice all over the country.
- Blacklivesmatter.com- Learn what they really believe and their goals.
 - “All lives can’t matter, until Black lives matter.” -BLM
- Raceforward.org – Short one minute videos promoting understanding of systemic racism.
- Bethelbridge.com- Promotes awareness and responding to the racial brokenness and systemic injustice in our world.
- Obtain definitions and articles regarding: white fragility, systemic racism, white privilege, etc.

Talk to Others

- Host a community building circle, town hall or informal discussion in your home, community, church or on Zoom.
- Engage people, market your incredible talent as a facilitator.
- If you have not provided mediation facilitative services to multiple parties in a session before, now is a good time to gain that experience! Just do it!
- Watch “Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man” on YouTube. The Host, Emmanuel Acho is a former University of Texas at Austin football player and played in the NFL. His interviews are informative and life-changing, especially the one with Waco HGTV superstars, Chip and Joanna Gaines and their children.

- Have private or individual conversations with family and friends. Talk about racism and what their thoughts are on what's going on in our world. Engage, educate, and listen to gain understanding for your next steps towards resolution and solutions.

Be Creative

- If you are not a facilitator and want to do something individually, write an op-ed article for your local paper or a national online media source
- Post helpful and thoughtful information on your social media accounts.
- Create a display or album of pictures that you can submit to your local paper of current events. Many people are documenting through pictures this important time in our country's history.

Keep Records

- Document these important discussions, meetings, conversations.
- Utilize evaluation forms, questionnaires, etc.
- Submit a summary of an event to one of the national organizations fighting for change, your local city council, commissioner, county judge, mayor or even your governor. They want to know the pulse, attitudes, ideas and solutions that may have come out of your facilitation. They may be willing to assist with the next one, provide financial support and thoughts or ideas on progressing the information obtained.

Remember, these three things:

1. These are suggestions of how to move from a statement of support, thoughts or ideas to personal action if you so choose. Whatever you decide to do is your own individual choice and is helpful and appreciated.
2. No matter how I identify myself, as a conflict practitioner, mediator or peacemaker, "I know how to assist people in coming to agreement."
3. Many of our values transcend our cultural differences. We are all in this big crazy world together and want to live in a safe environment, free to love and be loved, "Where we are not judged by the color of our skin, but by the content of our character." -Martin Luther King, Jr.

In conclusion, I would personally like to express my thanks to members of the TAM Outreach Committee for their commitment to giving TAM a voice and soul around Texas. We hope you will continue to join us for the monthly TAM Talks and share your ideas for how we can work together to support each other, learn and grow as individuals and in our beloved profession.