



An Open Letter to the Twin Cities
December 6, 2015

Dear Minneapolis and St. Paul:

My heart is breaking.

The last several weeks have been punctuated by bullets, loss, grieving, rage, protest, debate, and the sad recognition that we're totally lost on how to close the racial, economic and justice gaps that divide our collective community.

My heart hurts because yet again there's death and violence and nothing in terms of a real game plan for change by our leaders.

I'm in pain because I moved from Iowa to the Twin Cities five years ago believing that vibrant diversity here would be an asset and a way to fit in. Instead, after sitting in scores of professional meetings where the only color in the room is lily white, I've realized that all too often, diversity equates to lip service followed by persistent ignoring and marginalizing. In the worst of cases, diversity seems to be good reason to place targets on the backs of humans.

Did I mention that I'm white?

I ache because it's so obvious that our problems (emphasis intended) go way beyond police departments that can't get it right. With an achievement gap between white and black students that's worthy of the Third World and a dearth of meaningful, career-oriented employment opportunities for persons of color, it's clear that what's going on in the Twin Cities is deep-rooted, pervasive, and evil.

Yes, *evil*. Sorry to be so blunt but the time for politically correct Minnesota nice is long past us.

We're far beyond forgivable ignorance and mere negligence. "We're trying" no longer cuts it. Our collective community is firmly entrenched in the same mentality that gave us redlining even as late as the 1970's and the complete destruction of the Rondo neighborhood for I-94. White people in power have refused to change even though they've been told for decades that change is critical.

For proof, visit the "Suburbia" exhibit at the Minnesota History Center in St. Paul. At least the folks there aren't afraid to speak the truth.

What to do? What will it take to make my heart—and the hearts of thousands of others who want immediate positive change—not hurt? How in the world can we stop marginalizing whole groups simply on the basis of skin color or socio-economic status?

For starters, the two cities should each appoint a diversity and inclusion "Czar" (I suggest the title "Inclusion Czar" since "inclusion" is more to the point of what's needed in our community) to work jointly to vision, facilitate, coordinate and carry out a Twin Cities-wide plan that has the following elements:

1. Facilitated community-wide neighborhood meetings (what I call "Change Sessions") that focus on our commonalities rather than our differences and which educate on how to live with compassionate inclusivity. Translated: residents of South Minneapolis will travel to talk to residents of North Minneapolis and vice versa. Change Sessions will take place throughout both cities in multiple neighborhoods over two or three years or longer. In other words, the meetings won't be a one-shot deal.
2. Creation of a "Core Values" community education program that covers the economic value of a diverse workforce and which trains on unconscious bias, micro-inequities, and cultural humility. Critically, the training should also cover "trauma informed systems" (e.g. how growing up in dysfunctional family and cultural situations can create life-long acclimation problems). Additionally, the training must involve such basic things as how to talk to people who are "different" and how to involve, promote and sponsor persons of color, persons with disabilities, foreign-born persons, women and LGBTQ persons. The training should include *testing and certification* that the participant successfully understands these critical concepts, along with a *pledge* that the participant will actively work to make the Twin Cities more welcoming to people who are "different." Anyone should be able to participate in Core Values training and certification.
3. Enlistment of each city's chamber of commerce to train business leaders on Core Values. The list of certified businesses and their trained leaders should be published and updated regularly.
4. With the certification process, an employer should pledge to aspire to have a workforce that mirrors the percentage of non-white Twin Cities residents (approximately 36%), understanding that this target will be variable depending on workforce size and type of business.
5. Each city's school system should undergo Core Values training and have the same minority workforce target expected of Twin Cities businesses. The

names of Core Values-certified teachers and administrators should be published.

6. A condition of granting any city-based license should be Core Values training and certification. If you're going to be sanctioned by the city to do business, you darn well should be required to understand the customers and workforce with whom your business will interact.
7. Creation of a "Change Force" (as contrasted with yet another ineffective "task force" to study the problem) comprised of representatives from organizations that have already demonstrated how to effect positive racial and socio-economic change. (Examples include the Jeremiah Program, Joyce Preschool, Achieve Minneapolis and the collaborative that ensured for a diverse Vikings Stadium construction work force.) Working hand in hand with the Inclusion Czars, Change Force members will identify and implement additional strategies for positive, impactful and permanent change.
8. Enlistment of various white power centers to engage in Core Values training. This list must include the Minneapolis Club, the University Club, the suburban county clubs, and social service groups like the Rotary and Lions clubs. Until we have buy in from these white power centers, nothing will change for the better.
9. Obviously with developments of late, the two cities' police departments need Core Values training and an assortment of structural changes. This should be a priority of the Inclusion Czars.
10. Finally, there should be an annual report on the "State of Our Diverse Community" which tracks progress or non-progress toward making the Twin Cities more welcoming and equal for all of its citizens. In the event of non-progress, people and institutions should be held accountable.

I'm sure that some of the above is susceptible to being dismissed as naïve or uninformed or just too harsh. Yet, I feel the need to offer something to get us moving. What's more is that I'm willing to back these words with my actions—I'm not afraid to enter the fray.

But I can't do it alone. I need your help.

Thus, even though my heart is hurting, it still functions as meant to be—it remains open to offer compassion, kindness and energy to make our community a better place. To those thousands of other humans with similar hurting hearts, let's work collectively to change the Twin Cities for the betterment of everyone.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen (Ellie) Krug
Human

Ellie Krug, a resident of Minneapolis, is the author of Getting to Ellen: A Memoir about Love, Honesty and Gender Change and a diversity and inclusion speaker. The opinions expressed herein are her own and not of any organization with which she is associated.