

I have been thinking about you quite a bit in preparing for this day and for this academic year. I have been thinking about our collective work, and about our shared world.

I wanted to offer a few things *you* might think about as we start our work of learning, studying, writing, teaching and growing, all of us together under the big tent that is Organizational Psychology.

So, I made a list of what's been on my mind lately, some things going on in the world, and I want to share a few thoughts with you about how these relate to what we do and what we *can* do in Organizational Psychology.

I've been thinking about:

**Our planet –**

- The deadly flooding this summer in Bangladesh, India and Japan
- Hurricanes and volcanic eruptions in Hawaii
- Unrelenting fires in California
- A summer of record-breaking heat waves in New York City and around the world

**These United States –**

- Paul Manafort and Michael Cohen
- The unbearable shootings in this country and the right to bear arms
- Trade wars
- Immigrants and immigrant families
- The experience of studying in America as an international student
- And, what does it mean to be an American in 2018?

**The day to day –**

- The vast, complicated and difficult ongoing reverberations of the #metoo movement
- How the e-cigarette Juul was positioned as a means to quit smoking and is now used by hundreds of thousands of middle schoolers and millions of high school students
- The data breaches at Facebook and thousands of other companies across every industry
- That Apple is now worth \$1 trillion
- The pros and cons of electronic scooters coming to New York City
- The Marvel superhero franchise and the marvel that is the *Black Panther* film
- The superheroes that rescued the Thai soccer team trapped for two weeks in a flooded cave
- How fun it was to watch the World Cup with other people who were watching the World Cup
- That hotels are now offering “screen-free” vacation packages where you pay a premium to have the hotel staff confiscate your smart phones, iPads, and laptops for the entirety of your vacation.
- (I told my adolescent sons I can confiscate their phones for free and I'm happy to do it.)

I left off many things, I know. Your list would be different, most certainly. But, each of these, in its own way, is related to our work in Organizational Psychology.

How can we, as organizational psychologists, learn to manage difference more effectively, constructively, justly and sustainably?

How can we be sensitive to our constituencies while also opening up sometimes painful discourse? How can we collaborate on common goals across the most seemingly intractable and fractious divides? The increasing interdependence, mobility, contact and consequences of modern society intensify these issues immeasurably. Technology, big data, artificial intelligence and social media are revolutionizing everything about work, relationships, social norms, political processes, healthcare, the exponential growth of knowledge, the care or disrepair of our planet, the perception of truth and facts, how we access and consume music and visual entertainment, how we drive or are driven, and on and on.

You, our students, are professionals from around the world in a variety of industries and organizations including for-profit, not-for-profit, government, ngos, educational institutions and officers in the military.

Together, as an entire community, we are millennials, members of generation X, the silent generation and baby boomers. We work directly with change leaders across all these contexts and populations and in doing so we, faculty, always hold a systems perspective. That is, we always consider multiple levels of analysis including the individual, the group, the organization, and the environment, in understanding and tackling any problem. You, too, will learn to see organizations through this lens throughout your time in the program.

And a systems perspective has never been more relevant.

Indeed, what is happening in the world is also, of course, happening with you, our students, in our classes and in all the organizations we touch. As such, we work to hold multiple viewpoints, to consider differing perspectives, to navigate complexity and to expect continuous change as the new steady state. We are surrounded by as many examples of leaders acting badly and mistrusted and untrustworthy authority as we are of exemplary leadership and responsible authority. In response, we are committed to freedom of speech but we vehemently reject racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, homophobia and all forms of discrimination and oppression. That includes rejecting discrimination against those who hold differing political perspectives, differing worldviews, and opinions that may vary from the majority in the classroom or in the College.

In my *Group Dynamics* course this summer students responded to reflection questions before the first class, noting what they wanted to learn together. Many wrote they wanted to learn how to talk to people who held “different values” than they did.

I get it, I do. I struggle to do that too, sometimes. When people have different perspectives, experiences and values from our own, how do we talk together, connect, teach to and learn from each other, understand one another, debate vigorously and respectfully, challenge and enjoy one another? How do we build a learning community together when we are so different? How, indeed?

I coach executives on this very question all the time, reminding them that their team members may not share their same values and noting that we often unconsciously create environments that support our own values. That is, we mistakenly think that others are motivated and moved by the same things we are. So, the executive who highly values money might assume her team is equally motivated by a hefty bonus in their paycheck for a job well done. “I fight for my team to get the best compensation,” many an executive has told me, “What more could they want?”

Well, plenty, actually.

No one is going to refuse a bonus, of course, but money isn't always the single most motivating factor at work for some of us. Am I right, colleagues? Yet, that doesn't mean we can't work well together or learn from each other or collaborate. Certainly, some of my best friends highly value money! In fact, we might balance each other out or complement each other, or something like that. At work, executives are motivated to figure out how to collaborate with those who have different values because it's good for business. Here at Teachers College, it's good for learning. In life, it's good for our shared future.

If, as the poet John Donne wrote, "no man is an island," I think the same is true of humanity as a whole. We are interconnected in ways we've never been before, via trade, technology and travel, with our fates inextricably bound together. The great problems of our day—climate change, loose nuclear weapons, the democracy-endangering gap between the world's wealthiest and poorest peoples—can only be tackled collectively. There is no path to progress but forward, and our work in this program guides us daily – as educators, learners, scholars and practitioners with differing perspectives to seek understanding and ways to bridge the divides among us.

How can we as organizational psychologists learn to navigate our collective path forward?

As a program in Social-Organizational Psychology we are a community that studies these issues and we are extremely well positioned to work on them. We have knowledge, skills, frameworks and methods that enable us *specifically* to address these complex but critical issues of today's world.

- We are scientist-practitioners. Right here, right now we are studying change leadership, stereotype threat, sexual harassment and ageism in the workplace, intractable conflict, covert processes in organizations, the interplay of race and gender in workplace dynamics, the effectiveness of diversity training, learning agility, coaching effectiveness, assessment design, social networks, leading continuous change, and more.
- We are consulting to organizations both corporate and not for profit, across industries, around the world, using evidence-based practice, grounded in our and others' research.
- We are systems thinkers. We never limit our understanding to what we know about the individual, but always look also to the group or team, to the organization and its environment, considering the systemic issues to give us critical information to do a rigorous analysis and craft relevant and workable solutions.
- And we are committed to social justice. So, as a program, we strive to engage in work that will affect positive change and contribute to the greater good.
- The inextricable link between science and practice; the consistent use of a systems' framework; and a broad and deep commitment to working for a just world – these are our program's values, these are foundational to our work.

While on vacation this August my family and I visited a close friend of ours, a man named Greg Boyle, who created and runs Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, the largest gang intervention, rehabilitation and re-entry program in the world. Greg said, "America has only rarely seen more division, polarization and disunion than at this moment. And yet our best selves long for connection. Deep down, we know that

separation is an illusion, that there is no us and them, just us. We *want* to remember that we belong to each other, no matter how we voted.”

We belong to each other.

Remember that *we* are the program in Social-Organizational Psychology at Teachers College, Columbia University. All of us. We are a community, part of a long prestigious legacy of Psychology at TC – learning, teaching, doing research, growing and working together. We are living in a world that is extraordinarily complex, that can be relentless, that is, at times, horrifying, often exciting, sometimes rewarding, always compelling. And, remember that we are living in a world that is in need of us – all of us – working on its issues, affecting positive change, contributing.

So, my piece of advice to you – Try to bring your best self every day to our collective work.

Challenge and stretch yourself again and again even when it makes you feel uncomfortable.

If you are an introvert, push yourself at times to speak up more often.

If you are an extrovert, remember to listen more often than you speak.

Work to be open to new views, perhaps especially when you are pretty sure those views are wrong. Catch yourself making quick judgments and instead, consider that what others are trying to express might be valid. Tolerate not knowing the answer.

Risk learning something new in public, even while your classmates are watching.

Model that for each other.

Take responsibility for your choices and look to your own role in a situation before blaming others.

Assume good intentions in your peers, your colleagues, your professors, and the institution of TC. We are good people here and we are all trying to do the right thing even when it looks otherwise.

When you are frustrated, start with compassion – for yourself and for those around you and see if that doesn’t get you to a more productive place.

Share yourself, have fun, let joy in, work hard, get enough sleep, think deeply, hold on to each other.

I will try to do the same.

We will try to do the same.

If we make, and keep, this commitment to each other—to our community here—we can do meaningful work.

And highly valuing money too, is also fine, of course. No shame in that.

Thank you.