

We all have stories... real stories... stories that make us who we are and drive us to be what we become. As a CEO I have often felt isolated and unable to share what I experience personally because of my role. But as I enter 2023 I recognize that the world is starving for a new kind of leader - leaders who are relatable, real, honest, transparent. That is the trusted leader.

Because of the value of this agency I hunger to see CORA continue to be a strong voice in the education and human services world here in Philadelphia, I believe that our supporters and my employees should know who I am and what drives me to care about the work that I do. With that said, let me begin to share with you a bit about me. My story, like yours has many facets and includes:

- Being a nonprofit CEO of seven years, walking with my team through interesting times - no revenue due to budget impasses, a global pandemic and crisis, increasing anxiety among employees and our customers, a post-COVID changing business model due to emerging employee demands and desires, coming to terms with the impact of long-ignored institutional racism, a growing distrust of leaders and those in power and now inflation with revenue that will not keep up.
- My story is that I am a mother of four incredible children, three who came to me through the Philadelphia foster care system and one, a related cousin, who was privately adopted as an infant. I have a story of threats to my children and to my home, DHS involvement and home case management services, behavioral health challenges, and the results of educational and health neglect.
- My story also includes being a recent divorcee - the pain of living and walking with someone in addiction, losing a long marriage and best friend, watching my children suffer another lost relationship - the overall pain of watching a family get torn.

Following the hard years of walking an organization and a hurting family through COVID, on the other side of a steady increase of daily adrenaline helping me to not only survive but thrive, came a crash - total burnout personally and professionally. For months I hoped to see the burnout dissipate and my energy be refreshed and made new. For months I waited and relied on the strength of those around me to carry me, carry the organization, carry my family.

The eyes of burnout looked at the changing world, inflation, the pain and suffering our city's children and families, the education system, and the needs of my own employees who had increasing caseload and fewer supports, as an impossible task. The eyes of burnout had no more innovative ideas and the creative leader of today requires more innovation than ever. I was asking if I could continue to be a CEO.

Slowly but surely, like most of my leadership journey, I began to see the simplicity of our next steps. Most of the time innovation doesn't take an overhaul of ideas but rather a shift out of a box that we have placed ourselves or others have placed us in.

As I began formatting my thoughts on what this would look like I recognized the need for this level of transparency and HONESTY. I know that it is the impact of my story, and the story of my team, that will lead the transformative innovative change we will bring to our communities as we consider the rapidly changing needs of our children and families.

Over the next several months you will have an opportunity to journey with me as I use my story to help us think through what drives transformative change - what makes great leadership, how we use our story to impact innovation, how it is the collection of the whole coming together that drives change, and what we need to do gain real financial and service stability.

I invite you to follow my personal and CORA's journey that will drive us collectively to the transformative services we desire. Listen, react, respond and let's begin the dialogue we need to have so we can build well what is to come.