



Karen DeMeola is the 94th president of the CBA. She is the assistant dean for enrollment and students at UConn School of Law, where she plans, manages, and oversees programs and services for the student body, including career planning, disability services, and student services. She advises students confronted with a variety of issues, including academic advising, personal matters, and wellness challenges such as addiction and mental health concerns. In addition, Dean DeMeola is charged with implementing and managing diversity programming as well as professional and community development activities.

My house is full of books; a conglomeration of comics, sci-fi, horror, legal, self-help, race, biographies, historical tomes, medical, and anything that I can get my hands on. Free is better, but I have been known to pay, sometimes too much, for first editions of my favorite authors. At any one time, I could have 15 titles in circulation, more if I add Audible or Kindle books to my list. I enjoy the connections that seemingly disparate books have with each other. This is similar to the people in my life and the ways we connect as individuals and colleagues.

“Truth is Powerful and It Prevails”

- Sojourner Truth

By Karen DeMeola

My mother-in-law recently recommended a book, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* by Father Greg Boyle. I was intrigued because, well, tattoos were referenced in the title. I was less interested because a priest wrote it and, although I am on a constant faith quest, I still bristle at the word “priest” thanks to 12 years of Catholic school. Then I learned that Father Boyle was the founder of Homeboy Industries. The book combined several things I loved—compassion, race, second chances, and faith. Though the book was about all of those things, it was also about inclusion. Not only the ways in which gang members and former gang members were included in society, but also the ways in which they were included in the development of the business model of Homeboy Industries. A great example of the ways in which our compassion for others can guide us but also a lesson on the ways in which compassion can lead us toward inclusion.

In any movement, we need the majority

population to provide allyship. Validation by the majority tends to move things further and quicker than if we go it alone. At times, allyship turns into co-opting, appropriating, or creating a political movement based not on the voices of the marginalized group, but instead about what is best from the allies’ perception. This is a challenge and frankly, I was waiting for this to happen in *Tattoos*. Instead, I read of amazing brother- and sister-hood, of compassion, of a movement that transcended difference and embraced inclusion.

I think a lot about inclusion, or the lack of inclusion and the damage it does to people and teams. Many organizations consider it a victory when they hit a diversity target—webpages are updated and notes of congratulations are sent. However, what happens to individuals within the organization when they are limited by the boxes they check? How is the organization treating their “diversity”? Have our biases allowed us to think beyond gender, race, or

socioeconomic status and include these new voices in our conversations? Too often, the answer to these questions is no.

So, how do we do this? Inclusion is not easy, as it often requires us to stop and think about our behavior, our biases, and our processes. To move toward inclusion requires us to question why we do things in a certain way, to abandon stereotypes, and to see people as individuals contributing to the successes of our organizations.

Sojourner Truth said, "Truth is powerful and it prevails." Truth comes in so many forms. Allowing people to be authentically them, being uniquely you, and encouraging honest communication at all levels are examples. Being ready to listen, to act, and to hear what others are saying is necessary in moving forward. Taking the perspective of others as truisms and not questioning the veracity. Accepting that there are other perspectives but our own is necessary.

If someone says they have been marginalized, believe their perspective. Ask them why they feel that way, without dismissal or excuse making. If someone is not getting assignments, ask why, or go the distance and assign them something. Do an inventory of who you are inviting to play golf, to attend the symphony, a Yard Goats game, or anywhere business is being conducted outside the office. Is there a pattern in those you ask? Are you sharing the unspoken rules of your organization with everyone, or just a few? Are you placing additional committee work and obligations on your diverse co-workers? What are you conveying to those who do not get the invitations, who remain ignorant of the rules, and are not given all the information necessary to succeed?

This short book spoke to me in unexpected ways. It surprisingly wove together issues of faith, compassion, and inclusion. I cried at every page. The stories were moving, honest, and challenging. In the face of this adversity, face of death and despair, the hope and joy in creating opportunity, community, and collaboration was inspiring and a model for those of us who want to create inclusive organizations. **CL**

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