

I believe strongly in freedom of speech, perhaps especially when faced with ideas I disagree with, and as a businessperson, I haven't necessarily felt it's acceptable to express my political and social views. With the recent events shining a much-needed spotlight on violence, systemic racism, and white privilege, I've come to believe staying publicly silent on these subjects is no longer ok.

It's not just that silence equals complicity. Not publicly calling for change, for understanding, for love and for tolerance, is the same as actively calling for the opposite. I don't have anything profound or new to say. In fact, I'm struggling with what to say and how to say it, but it feels very important that I say it.

I'll concede that I am victim to the trappings of implicit bias, so I try very hard to recognize when I'm making assumptions about people based on their appearance. I try even harder to put aside those assumptions and react to and treat people based on what they say and do. I'm not saying "I don't see color" because of course that's what implicit bias is. I just try not to let it affect how I treat people. In my role as business owner and boss, I make it clear that racism and any intolerance is completely unacceptable. Moreover, I make it clear that my employees should feel comfortable with who they are. I actively make no judgements.

That said, I'll also concede write this from a place of privilege. I am heterosexual, male, and white, so I rarely if ever have to fear judgment based on my appearance. However, I am Jewish, and while I will never know what it's like to be face constant racism based on how I look, I have experienced prejudice and hatred ever since I've been old enough to remember.

In first grade, I was forced to pray before lunch. In high school, my best friend's father told me he assumed my parents were rich bankers. I also remember him once exclaiming, "A fight! A fight! A n----r and a white!" I've been asked to show my horns. I have hailed taxis for black colleagues because the cabs wouldn't stop for them. At an event at a university last year, one of my employees was escorted by security to the truck. He was black. Another walked right in unescorted. He was white. And I wish, I wish, I wish that it would all just go away.

I don't know which makes me more upset: that people are harmed by racism or that people are racist. It makes me sad, but I understand why it makes people angry and frustrated.

The violence that has accompanied the protests is terrible, and upsetting. Violence is upsetting in any context. I've read that no matter how vocal someone is about supporting for the protests and Black Lives Matter, if they are more upset about the violence than racism, they are focusing on the wrong problem. But it's more than their focus. They're in denial about their real feelings regarding the problem. They don't believe or understand the seriousness and extent of systemic racism, or perhaps even that racism is systemic at all.

Unfortunately, telling someone they're wrong is a notoriously terrible way of getting them to listen and change. We must recognize that the issues really are real, that we all participate in perpetuating the problem, and that we want to end the cycle.

As the old saying goes, the first step is to admit you have a problem.

-Josh, Top Dog, HG80