And Here We Are, at the End of 2020

This year will forever be remembered as a year of loss—the loss of patience, privilege, jobs and loved ones. We experienced what it's like to lose the things we've done freely our entire lives, like going to the movies or out to eat, without masks and the fear of getting sick. But it's also the year that we've slowly regained something we've been losing over time—genuine connections and sense of humanity.

Being forced to slow down and be more intentional with our actions, humbled so many of us and made us more human. Even when working from home erased the separation of personal and professional, we managed to build bridges of empathy between us through memes, virtual happy hours and stoop catch-ups. Juggling kids, dependent loved ones and home school, in between zoom calls, virtual panel appearances and writing business plans opened the door to understanding myself as a leader in new ways. I've had more space to truly digest lingering inequities in our society and understand how we can be a part of the solution as people and corporations.

This was true for brands as well, who were used to following strict guidelines, with clear directives of how and where to show up and when to stay in their lane. Well, those guidelines and safe spaces went out the window this year, when just as we couldn't hide behind our carefully crafted office personas, brands also had to reveal their authentic selves and decide their place and voice in the world—because being neutral was no longer an option.

This time last year, Black Lives Matter was considered controversial for many brands. But this year, racial justice

became an essential part of our corporate responsibilities. It’s unfortunate it took multiple tragedies to build up our unapologetic empathy muscle, but we are here now, with many of us moving in tandem towards justice. As a 20-year marketing executive, and an activist at my core, watching brands move from neutral stances on crucial issues to advocates for real change is truly motivating. It reaffirms why I love this industry and the power of communication.

During this time while we were all becoming a bit more humbled and authentic in our daily lives, it spilled over into how brands had to behave. The brands that were the most successful were the ones who weren’t afraid to be vulnerable. While authenticity has always been at the heart of brand conversations, it has never been so accessible.

As a mother and wife—one of this year’s work-life jugglers—having so many courageous conversations and movements happening around me, stretched me as a person and grew me as a leader. The lifting of the professional veils so many of us easily hid behind, provided raw insight into what is needed from 21st century leaders. This was an opportunity to wield transparency as a real tool that empowers people to be impactful at work and in the world. And this is only the beginning, if we decide. We have the opportunity to ride this wave into the kind of work many of us dreamt of when we started our careers. In the words of the amazing Ruth Bader Ginsburg: “If you want to be a true professional, do something outside yourself.”

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