

If not now, then when? If not us, then who?

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This is an unprecedented moment in time for all of us. As we face this pandemic within the context of our unique perspectives, we cannot forget what the past has taught us: History does not repeat itself; people do.

There have been over 1,100 incidents of COVID-19 related racist attacks against Asian Americans reported over a two-week period across the United States, as recorded by the Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council (A3PCON) and Chinese for Affirmative Action (CAA). This number may also be underreporting the extent, as many in the AAPI community have expressed reticence to rocking the boat or involving law enforcement. Over 60% of those respondents were of non-Chinese descent, which further reveals how this fear-driven xenophobia will continue to impact the many faces of Asian America.

It is easy to forget the history of the Asian-American experience, especially when the current prevailing narrative is one of model minority status. We are raised to endure hardships and to simply work through *our* issues like our immigrant forefathers and native predecessors. Looking back, it is unimaginable that systematic discrimination, like the passage of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1942 Executive Order 9066 for Japanese internment, would be allowed today. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has critically magnified the underlying prejudice that remains in the American psyche.

As Asian-American healthcare leaders, how do we lead during this pivotal time in human history? Here are three precepts to consider that may help focus how you approach this crisis with yourself, others, and your organization:

We don't control what happens, we only control how we respond

With so much uncertainty in our daily world, leaders must come to terms with the things they can and cannot control. The sooner one draws the distinction and accepts this reality, the more effective they can be in focusing energy on the things that matter. When faced with racial discrimination, microaggressions, or blatant xenophobic attacks, it is imperative to acknowledge the external insult, filter what is absorbed, and control your actions.

Protect and care for your staff, especially the most vulnerable

Every healthcare worker should feel comfortable informing their supervisor or anyone in administration of any incidents involving xenophobia or racism, whether it is faced at work, in public, or even social media. We must also not forget to protect those unsung heroes in our food services, materials management, environmental services, and security departments who are critical to daily operations. Statistically, many of these essential workers are racially and socioeconomically vulnerable, and may reside in communities with food insecurity and disparity issues. Proactively offering concern and support will help care for their well-being before they need it.

When systems break down, leaders step up

During times of uncertainty, it is easy to wait for answers or be told what to do. However, with an unprecedented crisis in front of us, leaders do not wait for answers; they find them. Even though things may not go as planned, this still presents an opportunity for us to rise to the occasion. We owe our frontline and essential healthcare workers the same level of leadership excellence that we expect of them in delivering exceptional care to patients.

As Asian-Americans, this is our time to represent and rise above. As our history is being written, it is important to demonstrate clemency and compassion through action, especially in the face of racial bigotry and discrimination. We are in control of our choices during this time of crisis, and only we will remember how we responded to this call of need.