

## How Two NBA Staffers Spent the Weeklong Pause

NBA Staff

July 2020

*During the week of June 15-19, the National Benevolent Association paused all staff operations and programs. For this week, the NBA did not host any events or meet with leaders of peer groups and various ministry partner organizations. The staff refrained from responding to emails and we were silent on our NBA social media accounts.*

*NBA recognized that the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic and the multiple instances of police brutality against Black people are not felt equally across all staff members. Beginning in 2019, the NBA has been working with a set of consultants and facilitators with expertise in areas of anti-oppression and racial equity. As the NBA, our commitment is to bring to light how we are complicit in maintaining unhealthy systems of discrimination and oppression. As a general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we actively support and partner with the Disciples Church in our denominational efforts to be an [anti-racist and pro-reconciling church](#), struggling to [dismantle racist structures and discriminatory practices](#).*

*After this weeklong pause, staff members Brittany King, Marketing Associate and Rebecca Hale Executive Vice President came together to discuss the week of rest, what it meant to them individually and offered some perspective on how other organizations considering a similar pause could do the same.*

### **Q: Why was the pause meaningful?**



**Rebecca Hale:** Early on, it was clear to us all that while we are all living through a pandemic, we aren't all living through it in the same way. For my colleagues who are people of color, they were facing a mounting health crisis with friends and family due to systemic inequities in the healthcare system. For colleagues with children at home, the new working at home 24/7 pace had unique complications, and I could go on.

Then after the brutal killing of George Floyd the reality that systemic racism is literally killing black and brown bodies added an unimaginable layer of pain and stress to

already pushed staff and their working relationships. It was clear as I looked at faces of NBA staff on Zoom—all was not well, and it could not be business as usual.

Into that moment came this gift of a week away—to lament, to protest, to rest, to play—to find a minute to start to make meaning of a pandemic and this unmasked racism at all levels of our society.



**Brittany King:** The time away was meaningful because I felt heard. I vividly remember moments in my career at other organizations where after seeing a video of a Black person killed on social media, I'd have to gather myself and put a smile on my face before walking into a meeting like nothing was wrong. That action of brushing it off has often come at my detriment. So, to get an email from leadership announcing that the entire organization would be taking time away and to have that honored, was truly indescribable. The extra time was needed and appreciated.

***Q: How did you use this time? Going into the work, what were your expectations and hopes and what actually happened?***

**RH:** I went into the week with a stack of books on my desk, my podcasts lined up, and some plans to meet some of my local officials to talk about policing in my town. I also went into the week with a hope of long mornings reading some novels on my deck and some hikes in the Smokies with some time to reflect on the kind of person I want to be in this moment and what was being called for from me as a team leader at the NBA.

Then as the week began, at 11:45 p.m. on Sunday night I got a text from Rev. Dr. Judy Cummings, pastor of [New Covenant Christian Church](#) and co-chair of the Tennessee Anti-Racism team. I'm newly on the team and hadn't even been to a meeting yet. Her text said "Help, our trainer for this Saturday had to cancel and we have over 40 clergy signed up for an all-day anti-racism training and I'm not canceling this training. Will you help lead sections on white privilege, white supremacy culture and oh yeah, the white caucus part."

That invitation came as such a gift—a clear call from the spirit as a white person to make this week matter. I won't lie though, it was daunting to sink into this work a little more deeply and prepare to help provide leadership in a new way around issues of systemic racism to clergy colleagues.

You have those rare moments in life where an invitation comes, and you know there is no going back from saying "yes." This felt like such a moment.

**BK:** In addition to my work with NBA, I am a freelance journalist. The murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and so many others made me want to write and tell stories more than ever, especially one of Black resilience, optimism, and pride. So, I planned to reach out to a few editors in my network to see if there was room for story ideas I had. But when I opened my computer Monday morning, it was very clear that I really just needed to be still. So, I listened to my body and did just that.

I leaned into activities that I love, but don't often get to do. I baked, a lot of goodies to drop off at loved one's homes, I caught up on podcasts and watched a good dose of reality television—my (not so) guilty pleasure.

***Q: What was hard or challenging during this time?***

**RH:** To be very honest, I could not have planned this week and maybe I wouldn't have planned this week in that way and yet, my heart is filled with gratitude. Because of the gift of time away NBA had given me, I was able to say a whole-hearted yes to being present for this work in Tennessee.

As someone who has been given so many opportunities, so many privileges if you will, some redistribution of time and energy seems appropriate and just in this season.

**BK:** Entering the week, a personal goal of mine was to stay off social media as much as possible. During a regular work week, I run the social channels for NBA, so I'm always plugged in and reacting to every notification. The weeklong pause gave me

an opportunity to step away from social personally and professionally. Still, I found myself reaching for my phone to scroll through Twitter while watching TV, or wanting to take the perfect picture of cake I baked for Instagram—both pretty unnecessary. I never realized how easily I picked up my phone and scrolled through social feeds!

**Q: What would you say to orgs/nonprofits/churches who are considering this type of intentional rest?**

**RH:** There is still work to do in understanding how this pandemic, social justice, and economic crisis is shaping us all. What it means for our work, our commitments and how much of a difference our social location and racial identity makes in how we experience this and that is going to be a long journey for each of us.

For the leaders helping us through this, whether they be in non-profits, congregations or other organizations, I know we are tired. There is plenty of literature out there talking about the coming leadership crisis as people face exhaustion and stress over leading people and organizations during such a time.

I encourage us all to think about what it means to honor each other and honor this work by providing some intentional time away for staff. It takes some space and reflection to understand what the long-term systemic changes these interwoven crises are calling for from us as leaders and from our organizations. Rest is part of that process. Time to sit is part of that process. A chance to get up on the balcony and see with new eyes is part of that process.

I say, let's not waste this crisis. Let's be transformed through it.

**BK:** In short, take it. Take the time a way, lean into the discomfort, the confusion, the doubt.

I understand that I'm privileged to be able to say that. I also understand that it is not that easy or simple for all organizations to give staff a week off. So, I encourage anyone reading this, wondering what a reprieve could look like for their staff to figure out what would work. Maybe it's a three-day weekend, a half day in the middle of the

week, or email quiet hours so inboxes do not get overwhelmed. Regardless of what it looks like for your organization. I think it's important to do something. Acknowledge that these are not normal times. There is so much stress and uncertainty outside of our work lives, yet employees are still showing up and doing the best they can. So, I really encourage organizations to find a way to honor that.

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*As the health and social services general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the National Benevolent Association partners with congregations, regions, general ministries, and a variety of Disciples-related health and social service providers to create communities of compassion and care. Founded in 1887 by six women responding to the needs of the day and on their doorsteps, for more than 130 years the NBA has continued to serve "the least of these." Learn more at [www.nbacares.org](http://www.nbacares.org).*