



An open letter to the LIFEDesigns community:

The past few months have been challenging times for our Agency, the LIFEDesigns community, and the greater community in which we live. We have been focused on the health and safety of our families, our clients, and our teammates as we faced the COVID-19 pandemic – a situation that has been changing rapidly, requiring us to change our response and procedures frequently. Every member of this Agency has responded professionally, and I would expect nothing else because every person employed by LIFEDesigns is a valued, professional member of the staff.

Even as we deal with the continuing challenges presented by COVID-19, another threat has presented itself – a lack of empathy and consideration, often with an unwillingness to give every person the respect we wish to receive from others. Bloomington is not protected from this threat, nor is LIFEDesigns. Much of what we have witnessed in the news and in our own community flies in the face of LIFEDesigns' vision of "communities that support all people, where each person is valued, and where everyone belongs."

This threat is as dangerous to our wellbeing as the threat posed by COVID-19. LIFEDesigns is a community of great diversity, and it is this diversity that makes our team strong and successful. Every day we have an opportunity to demonstrate the strength that comes from our commitment to be a community "where each person is valued, and where everyone belongs." Our words and reactions toward others are visible measures of this vision in action. We frequently find ourselves faced with behaviors of others – clients or coworkers – that may be difficult to understand or pose a potential threat to the individual or those around him. We demonstrate our belief in the value of that individual by our response: do we respond with caring concern and assist, or do we respond with anger and assert powerful control? Each time we respond with anger, each time we attempt to assert control through power we diminish the value of ourselves as well as the other person. As a community we are a group of individuals who are interdependent – our actions affect those around us just as their actions affect us. This has been put into words by many throughout history, but one of the more well-known advocates in my lifetime, Martin Luther King, Jr., perhaps explained it most eloquently in his letter from the Birmingham Jail:

*Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.*

We don't have to accept another's behaviors or biting words, but we do need to recognize the innate value of each person. A behavior can be unacceptable or even intolerable to us, but our response should be caring and without anger. This will be more successful in changing behaviors than responding in an emotional or angry manner.

I challenge each of us to look back at the end of every day to see how we have demonstrated we are part of "communities that support all people, where each person is valued, and where everyone belongs."