

From: Ann Lee <[REDACTED]>
Date: January 29, 2021 at 8:18:58 PM PST
To: Ann Lee <[REDACTED]>
Subject: A Message To All CORE Staff From Sean Penn
Reply-To: [REDACTED]

A Message To All CORE Staff From Sean Penn,

As a fellow citizen, I first want to express my extreme gratitude for your dedicated and inspiring work on behalf of your communities. You have gone above and beyond the vision of CORE leadership. As Chairman & Co-Founder of CORE, I've been awed by the evolution of our organization. It would be a lame conceit for any of us in upper management to claim propriety over the vision that could only have formed itself following the emergence of your talent, care, and sacrifice. The invention brought forward by so many of you. You deserve to embrace a unique pride, that throughout your lives, you can associate with these historic times. I cannot express with words the unprecedented sense of pride that I have to be associated with you.

That said, expressions with words mean little without actions clear and tangible. So, as I assess, and re-assess, my own responsibility in management to all of you, and to all those we serve in the race against mutations and the fight against the current strains of Covid-19, trust that I awaken pre-dawn and pass out post-midnight every morning and every night, pulling at my hair and pounding pavement, not only to scrape every penny I can find to facilitate continuing and scaling our work, but also to consistently consider the human toll of that work on all of you. I have extraordinary partners in this mission, most significantly my co-founder and our CEO, Ann Lee. Ann and I know very clearly where we have succeeded and where we have failed daily and cumulatively. The snowballing challenges of CORE's work are immeasurable, and while it takes no measure to recognize that mistakes have and will be made, I pledge to you that our focus on your safety, your well-being, and on our joint ability to continue the evolution of CORE's empathy and efficiency is a commitment we hold sacred.

It is in this spirit, and for this reason, that I am directly reaching out to each and every one of you to address a grave concern. In my now nearly fifteen years of working in disaster response beginning in Hurricane Katrina (and I'll spare you my "I walked twenty miles through snowy mountains to get to school" stories), the greatest lesson I have learned is that valuable, organized response is most vulnerable to destruction from within. Time and time again, I have seen people and countries betrayed by the pettiness of in-fighting from within the very organizations they most relied on. We do not ask, ever, that loyalty is blind or anything else that would trade accountability for the efficiency and empathy that we commit to those we serve or to each other. We have strong complaint procedures and endless other internal avenues for productive criticism. But, as a disaster response organization, each of our first accountabilities to ourselves must accept that our work can never ever be compared like the apples to oranges of other workplaces.

At the outset, CORE, of course, takes seriously and complies with OSHA and all applicable regulations. OSHA has an essential role in all workplaces, and while CORE does everything in its power to comply not only with the protocols of OSHA, but also the basic laws of common sense, we must accept that we have taken on jobs that must push that envelope virtually as far as is reasonably allowable, while fairly expecting that OSHA too, in its commitment to public service, will exercise the common sense understanding that by necessity, the structure of the work and workplace we provide demands an adaptability that is not cemented by pre-pandemic precedent.

And any among us who don't find themselves built in this way for the mission at hand, any of us who don't recognize our inherent duty to prop each other up, any of us who might find themselves predisposed to a culture of complaint, have a much simpler avenue than broad-based cyber whining. It's called quitting. Quit for CORE. Quit for your colleagues who won't quit. Quit for your fellow human beings who deeply recognize that this is a moment in time. A moment of service that we must all embody sometimes to the point of collapse. That's my job. And that's your job.

I am embarrassed to have to preach these words to the very people who are so dominantly beyond the proverbial choir. Those who, in effect, are every bit the leaders of CORE that I am. This message is not for you. And this message is not a random condemnation of those who may find themselves, for whatever reason, unwilling or unequipped to continue with CORE.

I'm sure many of you are correctly assuming that what has initiated this particular communiqué began with a pair of highly visible comments on a major news outlet's platform by two people who anonymously represented themselves as CORE staff. Those comments, which claimed to be revealing of inaccuracies about our vaccine effort at Dodger Stadium in a news report, were in themselves not only a propagation of deeper inaccuracies, but also indulged the personal opinions of those alleged CORE staffers in a way that violates everything that keeps us whole. We are an organization built on partnerships. Extraordinary partnerships. Partnerships in California. Partnerships in the Navajo Nation. Partnerships in Port-au-Prince, Washington, D.C., Fulton County, and numerous others. An undeniable example of a valued trust, mentorship, and partnership is that which CORE has with the City of Los Angeles and its LAFD. This high impact partnership did not happen by accident, and it didn't happen overnight. It happened because all the CORE strategic and operational inputs made by so many of you, and those you stand shoulder-to-shoulder with every day, earned it. It also happened because of the unique faith offered CORE by Los Angeles city leadership.

So, when two from within our ranks make unilateral decisions to indulge their own whim of dissent in the low-hanging fruit of cyberspace, and to, in this situation, register such obscene critiques of valued partners, or CORE itself, the only thing they will have contributed to is a lessening of CORE's impact in the fight against COVID-19. A fissure that could collapse a life-saving enterprise. And to whoever authored these, understand that in every cell of my body is a vitriol for the way your actions reflect so harmfully upon your brothers and sisters in arms. I have taken counsel and here will refrain from using the words with which I would otherwise choose to describe the character of your actions.

I want to select one among the uninformed inaccuracies that was stated in those shameful entries. It was stated that the Mayor of Los Angeles "...more or less ordered an OSHA violation." This allegedly related to excessive work hours for CORE staff. I like taking this one on. I like taking it on for two reasons. One, because over these last eleven months, I learned to quickly leave my cynicism towards political leadership at the door anytime a political leader acted in ways that earned my faith and my optimism. Theirs is not a job for the faint of heart. They get up every day to be smacked in the face by a tidal wave of bureaucracy and political push and pull. They voluntarily submit to hostile levels of scrutiny while leading inevitably trial-and-error initiatives that so rarely are acknowledged for their triumphs and so consistently are criticized when good intentions fall short. In my view, and much of it has been from a front row seat, Mayor Garcetti epitomizes both the humility and vision most valued as a partner with CORE. He has been a leader on every level. A leader and a listener. An encourager-in-chief.

So, let me make this EXCESSIVELY CLEAR: With all due respect to the Mayor's official authorities and responsibilities, none give him authority to "order" or impose directives directly on CORE staff. Full stop. His official authority is exercised at his initiative through a chain of command, that in the case of Covid vaccination programs, he directs through the highly structured and extraordinarily well-led Los Angeles Fire Department, with whom we partner on site. Notwithstanding an array of speculations one may make related to advance planning by advance planners from within the partnership as a whole, circumstances outside CORE's control and outside the Mayor's control can suddenly shift. As was the case in transitioning from testing to vaccination. When there is a quantifiable urgent need and an unquantifiable supply of vaccine, it should be of no surprise that we would have a day of reckoning where surge crowds and slim staffing merge. The un-noted shared triumph of our shared partnerships is that it jointly took us only one insane day to get squared away from those four-hour waits to the twenty-five-minute ones on the day that followed.

So, no, the mayor DID NOT order excessive hours of CORE staff and volunteers. He gave a directive to the extraordinary men and women of Los Angeles Fire Department. An occasion they immediately rose to. Following chain of command, leadership from LA Fire came to CORE leadership. The responsibility for any additional work hours requested of CORE staff falls squarely at my feet, and not because I "ordered" it. But because we in CORE leadership asked it of you, our extraordinary staff and volunteers. And guess what? You rose up. You did. Not me. All of you. And I will admit something. It made me weep. Not with some stupid self-presumed sense of fatherly pride, but simply a human pride in experiencing that people like you exist.

Contrary to what the aforementioned ill-equipped alleged CORE staffer's cyber comments claimed, I do believe Mayor Garcetti is a hero. I do believe that the Los Angeles Fire Department is chock-full of heroes. But what's unique about all of you is that you rose up from the ranks of common citizenship and built a citizen army into a heroic one. Please support each other in continuing this mission. You are the beginning of a once in a century generation.

Calamity response is, at best, controlled chaos. But I want to emphasize the word control and return at last to the general focus on partnership. We have all been given a gift. As precious a gift as we will ever be given. The utter human genius of those scientists who were able to choreograph control over this virus. A vaccine. A vaccine that we together with our partners administer into the arms of our fellow human beings. We have a job to do, and I beg those who are unwilling to do it, to quit. The notion that negativity is a proxy for insight is an understatement for the reckless narcissism and self-indulgence that played itself out in the broad betrayal of all.

In summary, here's what I believe we should focus on that perhaps may be more important than any comment that our already stretched thin resources should be channeled to breakfast buffets (that no one working in a clothing store would expect from their employer). I want to focus on the aforementioned gift we received. For those who read this who have already been vaccinated, your gift's ribbon is tied. For those who have not, be they CORE or any of our partners, and all those in the general population in the United States of America, do not minimize the gift in your hands of knowing that there is light at the end of the tunnel, because for so many millions upon millions of people in so many other countries, there has not even begun to be any evidence of hope that they will receive the vaccine all of us are so damn lucky to know we will. If we all focus our attention on the mission at hand, CORE will persevere. And within some gray area of time, between four months and two years, the population of this nation, all of us, our families and friends, will be protected from this horrible virus. Let's focus on saying thank you to science by continuing to support each other through thick and thin so that we may

be an organization who can ultimately reach out its tentacles of experience and offer its dedicated staff to a world in waiting.

I do not feel that I have served you well enough in this mission in making sure that I communicate regularly to all of you just how extraordinary you are. I hope that for me too, this is the beginning of a better day, and that I will be able to offer you your deserved acknowledgment from my end. To those I have overlooked, take this as my sincerest apology. I will try to look harder through the sea of masked faces to see the people behind them. No excuses. Only improvement. Let's all summon every bit of strength to be a sum that is as great as the parts you all so individually represent.

My deepest gratitude and respect,
Sean Penn
Chairman and Co-Founder of CORE