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GUEST COLUMN

## **Michael Johnson: Let community healing begin**

MICHAEL JOHNSON Jun 25, 2016



Johnson

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I appreciate Madison Police Chief Mike Koval, Dane County District Attorney Ismael Ozanne, some elected officials, Attorney Syovata Edari and dozens of community leaders working together to start the healing process in our community following Tuesday's arrest of Genele Laird outside East Towne Mall.

The decision to use a community restorative justice model to bring some accountability to this issue was the right decision.

Laird has accepted responsibility for her actions, and the victims at East Towne Mall, including the police officers and their union, supported this decision.

I also want to note that many of our police officers are great people and we should never generalize all police officers for the actions of some and make threats against their lives either.

### **My message to young people:**

If a police officer places you under arrest, DO NOT resist, swallow your pride and live another day to tell your story, especially if you are mistreated. There are great opportunities out there for you and don't allow one incident with law enforcement derail you from your dreams.

### **My message to police officers:**

When you approach a young person who might resist, please do your best to de-escalate the situation while protecting the public and yourselves. Keep in mind that you are peace officers as defined by the constitution of the United States and are held to a higher ethical standard. As you know, many young people may resent authority or you because of other underlying issues and your response might be the difference maker for the day, and when you make mistakes you also have to take responsibility for your actions like Laird is doing.

### **My message to the community:**

I have read some of the comments on social media and the news outlets regarding this incident and many of you have communicated so much hate and division toward one another that is sickening. Your divisive comments and actions will do nothing but further divide and rip our communities apart. So please show empathy and be willing to understand instead of being understood.

## My message to elected/nonprofit leaders:

Many of you were very vocal and helpful, while some of you were quiet and could not be found within a mile. Sometimes, leadership means being uncomfortable, and many of you chose to stay in a very comfortable place. If we are going to improve the condition of our community, it's time for more of us to be uncomfortable to create the change that is needed to improve the quality of life in our community.

Please don't wait until it's safe to advocate and come out and play!

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*Michael Johnson is CEO of Boys and Girls Club of Dane County.*



Put cameras where they'll do the most good -- on police officers

## Currents

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