January 17, 2022

Welcome to a day where across this country we stop and remember the life and achievements of Dr. Martin Luther King. I’m glad you’re here today to celebrate this influential American civil rights leader.

Dr. Martin Luther King is missed today for many reasons.

We miss how he approached his advocacy through nonviolence and civil disobedience, which costs him his life on April 4, 1968.

As a communication professor, I miss his use of language and rhetorical style where he used repetition, vocal variation, and a cadence that climaxed at an altitude that left all of us holding our breaths for a few seconds.

We need more leaders today who can influence positive change in the world through their character and by modeling activism and using a rhetorical style in the King manner.

These influencers are with us today; they are our students, staff, faculty, and community members.

Today, we talk about influencers in terms of our social media impact. How many followers does one have; apparently the more followers the more influence. It’s a numbers game.

On August 28, 1963, Dr. King influenced us through his character, competence, and the goodwill he expressed toward others. He influenced us through his language and actions.

Before a peaceful demonstration that included 250,000 people, with a speech that is widely considered to have been drafted in New York and then in Washington in the hours before the rally, he articulated in 17 minutes his call to action to the American public, which was to create a society based on character, rather than color.

While a graduate student at Boston U, I learned much about the life of Dr. King who earned his PhD in theology in 1955 from BU.

Dr. King’s approach and style to activism were influenced by a dean at Boston University. Dr. Howard Thurman was the Dean of the School of Theology and delivered numerous sermons at Marsh Chapel, which was the church that Dr. King attended. He was also one of the university’s first black leaders.

Dr. Thurman was also a student and disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. Dr. Thurman spent time with Gandhi in India.

Dean Thurman had a signature influence on Dr. King, especially in his developing a serious interest in social justice, social movements, and positively affecting societal change through nonviolence and civil disobedience.

To celebrate and honor Dr. King today, I would like you to listen to the words of Dean Howard Thurman who influenced Dr. King.

“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”
As members of the CSU Pueblo community, we need you to come alive. Recognize how others are influencing you and how you are influencing others.

As you come alive, we need you to do what Dr. King did well; he advocated for those who were powerless; he provided a voice to those who did not have the appropriate language.

Let’s take time today to reflect on the work of Dr. Martin Luther King and to recommit ourselves to coming alive and influencing positive change that is so desperately needed.

Best wishes,

Dr. Timothy P. Mottet, President