

Writing a Commitment Statement

Created by [Beth Godbee, Ph.D.](#) | Shared September 2020

What mobilizes and energizes your everyday actions and interactions? What underlies all your work—in your career, at home, in the community, throughout daily life?

Here, I share my commitment statement, which is always emergent and, therefore, in draft form so that I revisit and revise it often. And I invite you to write one of your own. 😊

Commitment statements can take many forms, but need to address the question of what motivates a life's work. I find it helpful to link commitments with [land/water acknowledgements](#), because both remind us of what's meant to be invisible when living in systemic oppression. Both ask to be lived out and [made actionable](#): not as statements that are written and left behind but as living articulations of everyday actions (both immediate and long-term).

As my close friend and confidant [Rasha Diab](#) has taught me: these aren't statements we write; instead, these are statements that write us. Here's where I am at the moment—in an ongoing process of learning and unlearning.

With love,

Beth (she/her)

SAMPLE:

Beth's Commitment Statement and Land Acknowledgements (Revised August 2020)

I begin by acknowledging that where I'm writing—Washington, D.C.—is the ancestral, unceded territory of the Nacotchtank (or Anacostans), also identified as the Powhatan Confederacy and [the Piscataway Nation](#).

Growing up in Tennessee and then living in Georgia and Wisconsin, I'm shaped by and indebted to many relations—peoples, places, and local communities. Among these, I want to highlight [Milwaukee](#) (my home as a professor), where I was rooted in place inhabited by the Potawatomi, Menominee, Ho-Chunk, Ojibwe, Sac and Fox, and Mascouten people and joined today by the Oneida, Stockbridge-Munsee, and Brothertown people. It was in Milwaukee that seeds and sprouts from many years [both rooted down and grew taller](#) toward recognizing the need for ongoing learning and teaching about history, place, relations, relationship-building, and accountability.

I have a lot of gratitude for and owe acknowledgement to the [CCCC American Indian Caucus](#), among *many* organizers, colleagues, and scholar-activists who continue to influence me and my relational understandings. To name a few relational influences, I'm especially grateful to Cedric Burrows, Rasha Diab, Tina Pippin, and Elaine Richardson as well as Gloria Anzaldúa, adrienne maree brown, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Audre Lorde, Resmaa Menakem, Mia Mingus, Loretta Ross, and Alice Walker, among others.

Today, I continue to learn from [colleagues working with and through the CCCC Caucuses](#) and commit to the ongoing work of [learning and unlearning](#), [redressing harms](#), situating myself and my work within larger webs of relations, and honoring ancestors and elders in the work for [justice](#).

I believe it's important to start by acknowledging Indigenous peoples' land/water rights and to tie the history of place with the continuing violence we see in everyday life of settler-colonialism, white supremacy, anti-Black racism, heteropatriarchy, and interlocking systems of oppression. I act from these acknowledgements, which I name here in an ongoing effort [to counter epistemic injustice](#):

Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color continue to be denied humanity and human rights, including the right to self-determination. Everyday violence defines our schools, workplaces, and community settings. [All our relations are marked by more than 400 years of enslavement in this land](#). Dehumanization undermines the humanity of us all.

Writing within the legacies of white supremacy and conditioned whiteness, I grieve. I rage. I commit to truth-telling, ancestral healing, and a relational ethic. I invest in repair. While recognizing continued harm—that I do harm—I strive to lessen harm and to learn and unlearn and to be more accountable. With deep gratitude and accountability to the Land, People, and Universe, [I strive to live toward justice](#).

As I attempt to discern what's called of me at this moment, I'm feeling-thinking again (and always, [as everyday practice](#)) about my role and responsibilities as a white educator, facilitator, writer, and researcher:

As an educator, I commit myself (again—in this moment and for the long haul) to struggling against systems of oppression and toward equity, justice, and the true valuing of all humans, non-human animals, and the earth.

As a white cisgender woman, there's a lot I don't recognize or know, and I commit to never stop learning and unlearning, to never stop recognizing my own complicity and harm done, and to never stop naming and struggling against injustice. I commit to doing self-work, to working with and alongside others, and to working for institutional and systemic change.

With deep breaths—BREATHE—I'm full-body *IN* this work ...
Open, humble, and ready to work ...

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How These Commitments Guide [Heart-Head-Hands: Everyday Living for Justice](#)

So, how does this statement shape the work you find here—through the online space and business of [Heart-Head-Hands: Everyday Living for Justice?](#)

It means a deep recognition of **both/and**: I (Beth) am *both* striving against *and* acting within systemic oppression and shitty social conditioning. It means that my actions often cause harm, while seeking to lessen harm. And it means that I'm regularly asking, reaching toward answers, and struggling in the mess of the following questions, among many others:

1. What's Guiding the Work You Find Here?

From reflective writing and research to courses and coaching, the offerings you find here use commitments as both the starting point and navigation system. I truly believe that we can't just *think* our way out of the incredible injustices, dehumanization, violence, and wrongdoing that characterize everyday life. We must *feel* and *act*, too. We need our [heart, head, and hands](#) for envisioning and enacting a more just world. We need deep commitments to justice and an attitude of "try-try again" for striving to live out these commitments—both in everyday moments and for the long haul.

[The offerings of Heart-Head-Hands](#), therefore, center embodied experiences and stretch across facets of everyday life. [To make commitments actionable](#), I'm intentionally invested in all three spheres of interaction: intrapersonal (self-work), interpersonal (work-with-others), and institutional (work-within-institutions). I commit to asking regularly: Where is my energy going? How am I acting on my commitments? How am I falling short? Where am I *not* engaged, *not* doing the work required? What needs to shift and change?

As I hold these and other questions, I use the "[strong yes](#)" as a compass. Guided by commitments, embodied knowledges, and accountable relationships, striving toward justice involves a lot of ongoing self-work and reaching toward integrity, too.

2. How Am I Striving Toward Accountability?

Too often, we're trained to value what's comfortable and easy and to avoid conflict and, therefore, to avoid accountability. Instead, I value showing up imperfectly, committed to *striving*. This means that I'm not only making mistakes, doing harm, and learning in real-time, but I'm also showing up as a learner/un-learner in public, which feels scary and always humbling. (I repeat Docta E's mantra "[do it scared](#)" on a regular basis.)

Accountability and support structures are essential, and these have taken different shapes in my life over time, including coaching, counseling, close friendships, and co-authoring groups as well as academic review processes and mentoring relationships. Currently, I'm investing *daily* in [pod relationship-building and accountability work](#): strengthening reciprocal relationships with a small group of processing partners who help with striving toward accountability and reaching toward repair. These "pod people" include four other people who are engaged in similar questions of unlearning whiteness and white supremacy and the harm we do through these systems. The work is m-e-s-s-y, yet so life-giving.

I have a lot to learn about speaking truthfully, breaking patterns of people-pleasing, and embracing conflict. And I commit (again) to never stop learning and unlearning. I do this from a place self-compassion, staying with calls to show up steadily, with stamina and staying power.

3. How Do I Relate to Money and Resources?

The messiness of this work includes that it's messy for me to be in business within capitalism: a system of exploitation and oppression. I resonate strongly with the language of "participating in capitalism under duress," which Monique Liston and [UBUNTU Research & Evaluation](#) use to name how businesses can function within oppression. For me, being under duress means always being conflicted: if ever there's an easy answer, then it's likely to be a wrong one, too.

I take from this language the need to relate differently not only with money but with all resources; to betray capitalist goals; to unlearn internalized classism; to honor the earth; and to reach toward repair of historical, persistent, and inter-generational harm. This means that as an individual and as an organization, I'm again embracing both/and. On the one hand, I recognize my need for a sustaining income, as life in the United States is incredibly precarious (within capitalism, human rights, including rights to food, housing, and healthcare, are tied to work, and many times flat-out denied). On the other hand, I recognize the need to guard against hoarding and relate *very* differently and creatively with money (from use of sliding scales to pro bono work to offers that re-route access and other resources).

I'm wary of neat solutions that quantify redistribution and stop there (too often, they seem like having things figured out: an allure of whiteness), so instead I choose a messier route—one that involves questioning all resources, including what's come to me historically, what's in my hands to heal, and what's being asked for me to release. This means that I question how money and all value systems are functioning in and beyond the business: through generations, in communities, and within institutions where I'm affiliated. Particularly, in my relationship with higher education (as an academic and former professor), this work involves careful attention to who's listened to/for (and who's not), who's credited (and whose contributions are hidden), whose time is valued (and why), and much more.

In total, being in the mess of money matters means seeking more ethical practices—and not only with income but also with ideas and time and access and resources and more:

- What brings me closer to alignment with social, racial, and environmental justice?
- What's involved in striving toward justice as an everyday life practice and one that makes this work, this business possible, too?
- Where am I investing myself, my energies, my resources? And why? And what needs to change?

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Now, your turn.

What would you include in your commitment statement?

And how might this statement direct your career decisions?

