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Stephanie Robertson  
Jeremy Petranka

## Navigating SheaMoisture Through a Racial Awakening: Cara Sabin's Authentic Leadership

### Introduction

*Shea moisture??? I feel deceived, fooled, bamboozled, hoodwinked, duped, betrayed, bewildered*

— @layla17m. Twitter, 9 June 2020, 12:31 a.m.<sup>1</sup>

Cara Sabin (she), chief executive officer (CEO) of Sundial Brands, stared at her phone in disbelief on the morning of June 9, 2020. SheaMoisture, Sundial's flagship brand, was trending on Twitter. At the peak of the Black Lives Matter protests occurring across America, SheaMoisture was being called out for marketing to the Black community while being owned by Unilever, a company whose CEO, Alan Jope, was a white male (see **Exhibit 1**).

As a Black woman, Sabin was deeply pained by the online attacks. She was strongly proud of leading a company that was Black-founded, Black-led, and run by a majority Black executive team (see **Exhibit 2**). Throughout her career she advocated for the voice of the Black consumer. She co-founded 25 Black Women in Beauty to promote and celebrate Black women in the global beauty industry. She was honored to lead an organization "built on the core belief that only commerce can bring true economic independence to our communities and empower women to break the cycles of wealth disparity."<sup>2</sup>

As the attacks on SheaMoisture intensified, Sabin recognized that the brand was facing a crisis. If the Black community turned away from SheaMoisture, its core strategic position was at risk. But how should SheaMoisture and Sabin address this crisis? Should she wait to see if the crisis would blow over? If not, what was the correct communication strategy? In addition to her company and Unilever, who were the significant stakeholders and how would they be affected? What should the message be, who should deliver it, and how should it be delivered? As a Black woman, was she willing to incur the personal attacks that would inevitably occur if she responded? As she watched social media become more hostile by the minute, Sabin knew that, no matter what, she must answer these questions quickly.

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