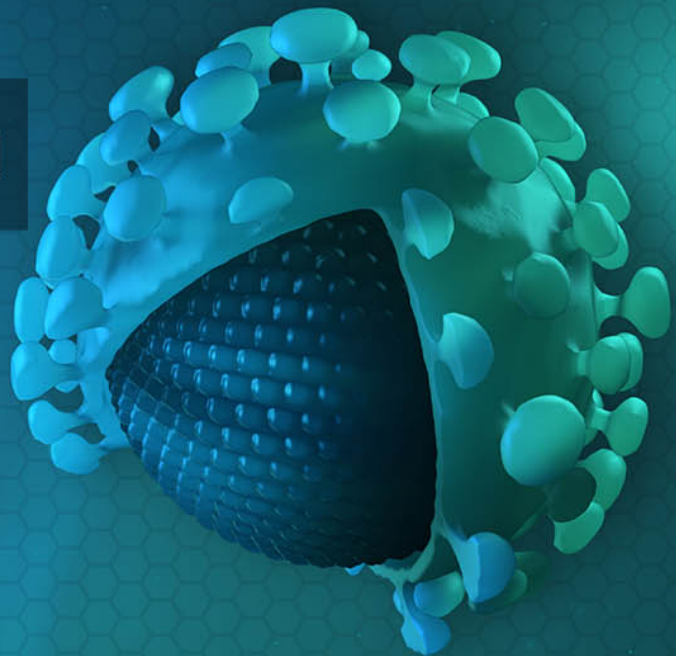


# SURVIVING THE CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN & SOCIAL ISOLATION

#LetsResetNormal



Creating a New Normal in a Changing World

VARIOUS AUTHORS  
A Global Collaboration



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Published in the United Kingdom by Wordcatcher Publishing, [www.wordcatcher.com](http://www.wordcatcher.com)

Downloads page for a variety of formats is at [www.wordcatcher.com/LetsResetNormal](http://www.wordcatcher.com/LetsResetNormal)

ISBN: 978-1-78942-340-2 PDF / 978-1-78942-341-9 EPUB

# Introduction

What can I do to help?

This is a question that is clearly popular on Google (today there were 25,270,000,000 results for this search). It's in our nature to want to help each other – that's why social isolation is so difficult at the moment for so many of us. We like being together, and we like to help each other.

That was the motivation behind this book. There's no profit for anyone, nobody is being paid to get this book or the articles out. It's about a common purpose, a common belief that by sharing experiences we can help each other to cope. The authors of these articles, and the editors who volunteered to work on them, share a common desire to reach out and help, and we hope that this is the start of many conversations for post-lockdown too. Not just in isolation, which is going to be painful for millions of people, but with a changed world when we re-emerge.

The national and international response to COVID-19 has been profoundly different to anything we've seen before, and we have seen pandemics in the past.

There are local and international issues that have been brought to the forefront of people's minds, and already there are call for changes in the way we do things when we return to the 'new normal'. We think that the old normal will change, but predicting how isn't easy. Political, social, economic, and technological changes will arise as the repercussions of this global event reverberate, probably for decades to come. This seismic jolt for our species is a wake-up call. Together, #LetsResetNormal

## Organising the Articles

It quickly became apparent that putting these articles in any kind of order would be problematic, and you could argue the case for their organisation in a number of ways. There is no hierarchy, none better than any other, instead we have attempted to present them with some sort of grouping to help readers find the articles of most relevance to them first. But, because they could be ordered differently, we suggest working through them all. If you find yourself with time on your hands, this is the perfect opportunity to read from different cultural and national standpoints. Maybe your thoughts and actions will shape all our futures.

# PART ONE

## Stories from Asia

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### Dealing with uncertainties: learnings from the coronavirus

Eddie Jiang

*China*

China, as the place where the coronavirus was first confirmed, has encountered the suffering earlier than any other countries and has accumulated quite a lot of understanding during the fight. Below are some thoughts and ideas from my personal experiences:

Mindset is key; it is the foundation that will help people through the crisis.

#### **Victim mindset vs. accountable mindset**

We know that people can have two different mindsets towards what is happening around them. The victim mindset focuses on the “they” zone that includes all the factors that are NOT controlled or influenced by oneself, while the accountable mindset focuses on the “I” zone where the factors can be controlled or influenced by oneself. Due to this psychological foundation, victim mindset usually leads to emotions of anger, disappointment and feeling unfairly treated, and to behaviours of blaming, finger pointing, complaining, etc., and even sabotage. Conversely, an accountable mindset usually leads to emotions of acceptance and calm, and to behaviours of taking action, thinking of solutions, etc.

During the lockdown period you can see a few people trying to break the rules, sneaking around to break the lockdown, abusing the volunteers who conduct temperature checks or the guards of the residential area, and so on. These behaviours are driven by the victim mindset. This does not ease the situation, but actually puts themselves and others in danger. You can also see some people wearing face masks according to government advice, complying with the regulations and having their temperature checked whenever requested. And some people joke: “I am so happy that I can make a contribution to the mother country by just sitting at home and doing nothing”. Also we can see some companies and individuals creatively thinking of ways to turn this crisis into an opportunity. One of my clients has promoted a concept of “no-touch” service to ask hotel customers to register their health status via an app they developed. Although they provide the app to hotels free of charge, by turning the paper registration into a small mobile phone program, they have strong support from tourist management authorities and can penetrate into a large number of hotels. This can bring huge business opportunities for their future products and services.

#### **Realistic optimism**

During the pandemic, society and individuals are facing very direct and practical challenges, e.g. work coming to a halt, cash flow shortage, supply shortage, etc. People very easily feel trapped

in their present difficulties, then become shortsighted and panic. A current example is that I heard some freelance consultants are starting to look for in-house opportunities already. Should we totally change our career path because of a crisis that will only last for several months?

There was a saying from the great Chinese leader Mao ZeDong, “Despise the enemy strategically, and take full account of him tactically.” Strategically thinking, look back to the Black Death in the 14th century, the 1918 pandemic flu, the 2003 SARS epidemic, and to H1N1 in 2019: none of them stopped the growth and development of mankind; neither will COVID-19. Eventually this will pass and everything will come back on track. It’s just a matter of time. So we need to keep faith and confidence. This is the “optimism” part of my statement.

In China, the government has taken very strong measures to reduce the spread of the virus, and people are strictly following the rules. People's minds are focusing on how we can make a living in a different way, how we can reduce contact with others to the minimum while keeping life as normal as possible, how all the preventative measures can be executed as quickly and strictly as possible. That can make a tremendous impact in controlling the situation. This is the “realistic” part of my statement.

The behaviour leads to the final results. With a positive mindset, the resulting behaviours have a strong influence on what can be achieved.

### **What can we learn about leadership?**

1. Be transparent. By doing so, people clearly realise the seriousness of the disease. This enables people to know the “why” of all those lockdown measures, which are for the sake of their own health and wellbeing. The statistics and data for the whole country were published on a daily basis through many channels, particularly on portal sites and their mobile apps, e.g. Sohu.com, sina.com, qq.com, etc. These measures were implemented shortly after the outbreak in Wuhan.
2. React very quickly and boldly. This was the very first time in recorded history a decision had been taken to totally lock down a city with a population of 12 million people! And as confirmed cases were found, other cities were also locked down in a very short period of time.
3. Be clear. Clear instructions were given on what people should do and what is forbidden. Then the consequences of breaking the rules were announced.
4. Provide support. During the lockdown period, other provinces supplied tons of essential supplies to the city of Wuhan, built facilities for quarantined people to stay, provided free food for them, implemented policies to prevent employers from making employees redundant, reduced taxes for employers, delayed loan interest payments, and so on. These measures greatly helped to reduce the short-term pressure for both employees and employers, and helped build confidence.
5. Success was built on people in communities volunteering to form teams to help and protect each other.
6. Communicating human stories about doctors and nurses going into Wuhan, which is the most front-line and dangerous zone. Some of the stories were very touching. Also examples of people helping each other locally in the community were published in the media. This type of communication delivers very strong positive energy to the society.

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## Connected coaches across Asia

In this extraordinary series of stories from Julie Zheng (Shanghai), Sabrina Park (Seoul), Deana Peng (Tokyo), Travis Green (Bangkok), and Vimala Suppiah (Kuala Lumpur) they each share how they have dealt with COVID-19 since the early days of the outbreak in January 2020. On 26 March they jointly delivered a webinar called “Coronavirus Lockdown: Learning from the experiences in Asia” for the Climate Coaching Alliance (CCA), hosted by co-founder Josie McLean. A recording is available via the website: [www.climatecoachingalliance.org](http://www.climatecoachingalliance.org).

Reflecting on their experiences and stories, it is possible to see a “coming back to centre” that is generative. In this present time, guiding principles enable us to re-find ourselves and from that place reduce our anxiety and reconnect with greater ease. Deana, Julie, Sabrina, Travis and Vimala are all coaches who came together for the first time on March 5th to co-host part of the Climate Coaching Alliance’s ambitious 24-hour marathon on “Coaching and the Climate and Ecological Emergency” where two hosts in each of the 24-hour time zones facilitated hour-long discussions that involved hundreds of coaches worldwide. On this day, Climate Coaching Action Day (suggested by Coaching at Work magazine), the calls started in New Zealand and each hour moved from east to west ending in Hawaii 24 hours later. They all continue to be involved in the CCA.

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## A Chinese perspective - the lessons learned and re-establishing trust

Julie Zhang

*Shanghai, China*

In the late afternoon of Jan 21st 2020, after a client meeting, I walked out of a skyscraper office building in downtown Shanghai and emerged into a crowded underground cabin. I hadn’t known that would be my last face-to-face meeting and my last touch of the busy city life for another two months.

The next day, disturbing news about the virus started to spread, followed by a complete lockdown of Wuhan city on the morning of Jan 23rd, the last working day before the Chinese New Year holidays. Fear loomed over even quicker than the virus spread, wiping out every bit of the celebrative atmosphere. Everyone was checking if they had had any encounters with people from Wuhan. So did I.

The scene of my last meeting came back vividly in front of me. A suitcase with all sorts of stickers stood quietly in the corner of the meeting room, waiting for its owner to get on the next trip. We spoke about how lucky we were to meet in person amongst his busy travel schedule. Had he been to Wuhan recently, or might he just have come back from there? All these doubts flooded into my mind. I checked his social media. He did not have any recent posts, but his account indicated he was from Wuhan! My heart sank.

Over the next few days, I drank far more water than necessary, was sensitive to any feeling of dryness in my throat, took a few deep breaths every now and then to check if I had difficulty doing so, and kept wondering if I should write to him to ask. How can I find out the truth without putting a label on him, without being perceived as distrustful, without hurting our



relationship? I noticed my anxiety grew with the case number curve. I questioned myself. "Am I going to spend the rest of my holidays like this? Can I trust he will inform me if he is at risk? Can I trust the medical system in Shanghai?"

I chose to trust him, the knowledge and efforts of thousands of medical workers, and the beloved ones around me. I shared my drama with family members. After they laughed off my anxiety, we all agreed to stay in self-quarantine at home to eliminate any possible chances of affecting others. We soon found out we were just a few amongst 35 million disciplined citizens, who proved that we were trustworthy through our simple actions.

The vast majority of us have earned a GREEN QR code shown on our mobile app, that now allows us to go back to office buildings.



Exercising trust, holding faith and hope has allowed me to focus on what I want to be and do. I have since found a greater state of being that I would not want to let go of, even when things go back to normal. The virus has changed my life and work in many ways, and in hindsight, I am amazingly positive. I have made a promise to myself: be grateful for what I have, and stay focused.

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## **My life is the most important thing to me. So, I focus on that rather than Covid-19**

Sabrina Park

*Seoul, South Korea*

Four years ago I had cancer surgery. I didn't take any medication or have radiation afterwards; I just decided to focus on my life rather than the cancer. My life is the most important thing to me. I treated my illness like it was my best friend; I wrote letters and talked to it: "Thank you for coming into my life." That gave me a lot of insight into myself and my life.

I see the Covid-19 in the same way as I did my cancer. I started to speak to it and focus on my life rather than the virus.

Now, I don't have much coaching. My income is low but what I do have is time. As a coach, I asked myself a question: "If I didn't have to work or earn money, what would I want to do now?" I got an answer: "Live life."

Now, I enjoy being in the moment more, sharing my positive energy for the people in the world online, and taking care of people around me. I also have time to meet a friend who feels lonely, have lunch and take a walk together.

What I learned and experienced from Covid-19 is enormous: We are human beings and we are strong and wise enough to live with this.

1) The environment always shows me who I am. As a coach, I focus on my true presence and show who I am, not on Covid-19.

2) We are connected in the world, we are one. So, if I keep peace in my mind, the world will be at peace.

What I want to tell people is: Covid-19 does not kill our life, but the perspective about the Covid-19 kills our life. Let's show our best self to ourselves in daily life. Thank you for being there and I love you!

Thank you for reading my humble words.

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## **A mother's reflection on acceptance**

**Deana Peng**

*Tokyo, Japan*

While I was cooking dinner on 24 March, my mind was mostly thinking about what I would like to share as my coronavirus experience reflection. As I finished washing the dinner plates and settled myself down with my laptop, breaking news popped up on every screen I have at home. The Tokyo Governor will be holding an urgent press conference at 8 pm tonight. The governor stated that forty infectious cases had been reported in just one single day, today in Tokyo, and that we are now in a critical phase with significant risk of a further outbreak. Just like that, out of the blue my world fell apart. It was like *déjà vu*.

On 26 February, I had received a phone call to postpone the team coaching project I had been so looking forward to. Following that call, numbers of emails flew in, all requesting either cancellations or rescheduling. Within a week, my calendar that had been filled with work, private appointments, my son's after-school lessons and PTA schedules had been totally torn apart. It was in fact the best first-quarter plan I had had in recent years – all disappeared in a blink.

So how am I holding up? Surprisingly, I am taking it well.

We have no control over the nature of this virus. No cure, no vaccine. The only thing that we have control over is our mindsets and the choices we make. We could choose to blame some countries, blame the authorities, blame the person who bought the last pack of masks or the last roll of toilet paper in front of us. Or we could choose to accept it and welcome it into our lives. We could do what we human beings are good at. We strive. We learn. We express our compassion to others and connect with others.

This is the time to be cautious but not frightened. This is the time to be distant from the virus but closer to people's hearts. This is the time to write emails to friends, especially those you haven't got in touch with lately, to reconnect. This is the time to share the goodness of people and to bring the good out of people, to which we coaches can contribute greatly.

After watching the press conference, my son said to me, "Mom, I think we human beings are responsible for this virus outbreak. We didn't take the warning seriously and that caused this outbreak. We are the one who caused this problem. Just like the climate issue we are facing."

I am so proud of him and feel so grateful. I am grateful for the opportunity for my son to learn this precious lesson. I am grateful for this special time I am able to have with my twelve-year-old tween 24-7 for these few weeks and somehow I get a feeling that we will be OK even when he turns into a teenager soon. I am grateful that my schedule had cleared so that I was able to co-host a part of the CCA 24-hour conversation on climate change and get to know all the wonderful coaches around the world and be inspired by them.

This is a learning journey for all of us. Have faith, spread our love, and we will be okay.

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## **Disruption, chaos, and balance... paths to a new normal**

**Travis Green**

*Thailand*

I'm an American in Thailand, pretty organised, but the last few days have been an emotional and physical rollercoaster. We have been on the Coronavirus front line since mid-January since the Chinese are a huge part of Thailand's tourism and Bangkok's demographics. But it wasn't until last week that the government started to heavily restrict movement and implement countrywide anti-Covid-19 policies. Now Bangkok is completely locked down. There are checkpoints, over 365 of them, within the city and between provinces, to try to deter people from moving around and spreading the virus. As I write we're in Pattaya, but that's a story in itself.

Last week I was forced to leave Thailand immediately and unexpectedly due to confusion over my visa status. With limited options, as Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam were not welcoming guests, I went to Vientiane, Laos. Even though I love Laos and have a friend that lives in Vientiane, it was stressful leaving the family to travel between foreign countries in the midst of increasingly restrictive policies. The majority of land border crossings had been closed between Laos and Thailand, but visas on arrival (VOA) were still available at the Vientiane airport. I arrived on the last day they were issuing VOAs but left the next night as airlines were cancelling flights, and rumours of shifting policies were flying around the internet. It felt like I was taking the last flight out of Laos!

Beyond my own story requiring me to be in Laos for thirty-six hours, my experience there made a deep impression on me. Vientiane, the growing capital of Laos, was so quiet. You can tell Vientiane is experiencing growth and development, but on that day the town seemed in a coma. Tourism was non-existent. The night market was asleep. The open-air restaurants lining the Mekong river had only empty tables and bored workers. The streets were empty,

construction projects inactive. It was a depressing feeling, knowing that things would not be getting better any time soon for the people living in this city and this country. At that time, Laos had no confirmed cases of Coronavirus, but everyone I talked to knew that it was in the country. It felt like the national strategy was, 'We are not equipped to deal with the virus, so let's say it's not here.' Laos is one of the poorest countries in the world. I have visited several times over the last twenty years. I love the people, the culture, the 'lovely lazy Lao' attitude; they brew the best beer in the region, Beer Lao, and the only serious drawback for a foreigner was if you ever needed the health system. I visited the hospital in Luang Prabang (the second-largest city in the country) out of curiosity and it confirmed all the fears and assumptions you have about a developing nation. I was both thankful and saddened to leave Laos, and curious to see what the future has in store for this country and the rest of the world after the pandemic. What lessons will stick?

But back to the family. Next we came up with a plan – myself, my wife and our two boys aged six and three – and drove south from Bangkok for two and a half hours to an island, Ko Samet, to shelter and self-isolate in a place on the beach there through to April. Then without warning we had to get off the island: the Thai government announced new restrictions that made staying on Ko Samet no longer possible, and we had about two hours to leave the island. I was meant to be hosting the call with other Climate Coaching Alliance (CCA) members on 'Coronavirus Lockdown: Learning from the experiences in Asia' on the Thursday (26 March), but instead we were on the road travelling to a newly booked place to start on yet another 'new adventure' in these crazy times. Our family in Bangkok suggested we stay near Pattaya.

In Bangkok they go out for food in the morning and stay in the house for the rest of the day. As for many parents, it's tough with active kids, so we rented a place in Pattaya. We are hunkering down: having a pool is our best friend these days! Tires the boys out and it's fun for all. We are experiencing the world moving at a dramatic and unpredictable pace on many levels, and sharing these insights and stories ASAP can help amplify their meaning.

So, here's my conclusion. I have been engaging with other life coaches over the last week, and the most thought-provoking conversations have been on the relationship between an individual 'doing' and 'being': the idea that learning on the 'being' part of ourselves will provide clarity through the chaos. For many people (including myself) this is hard. In my experience, 'doing' is the default mode for many of my clients when confronted with stress and a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world. The pandemic could provide coaches with an opportunity to share the tools of our trade to help people guide themselves to safety – whatever that means for them. I have found this out personally. It's a work in progress.

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## **The coronavirus threat: a Malaysian perspective**

**Vimala Suppiah**

*Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

“Renewal requires opening yourself up to new ways of thinking and feeling.”

— Deborah Day

It was a social call. An evening visiting my sister. My nephew Deva read out from his mobile phone about a virus spreading in China. It sounded like fake news and I said, "It's fake news, Deva." He continued to read from his phone and said, "It's in a place called Wuhan, in China." That's how I heard about Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), a virus with a crown.

As the news of this virus played out on social media, Malaysia as a nation was gridlocked by another kind of a home-grown malaise, a political turmoil of betrayal and losing trust with the politicians. On 24 February 2020, Malaysians woke up to the news of the unexpected resignation of its 94-year-old interim Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, upending the country's politics following the 2018 election. And as this piece of news broke and the nation went into a state of shock, fear, blame and anger leading to panic buying, a gathering of religious worshippers of 16,000 people assembled in a mosque in Kuala Lumpur from 27 February to 1 March. As a 34-year-old Malaysian man who attended the event died on 17 March, the first death linked to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), that event became the source of many infections spanning Southeast Asia as there were over 1,600 foreigners from parts of Southeast Asia at this gathering.

The Malaysian Ministry of Health estimated that out of the 673 confirmed coronavirus cases, nearly two thirds are linked to the four-day event. Currently the numbers of confirmed cases are rising and the restricted movement curfew of people is extended to two more weeks until 14 April with borders shut and schools, universities, religious places of worship and most businesses closed, in an attempt to control the outbreak.

Against this backdrop, workshops I had planned with my partners began to get postponed. Trainers, coaches and facilitators were sharing that clients were cancelling meetings and work, and sharing the impact on their income stream. As for me, the face-to-face coaching work completely dried up as we were all preparing for socially isolating and started talking about working from home. On a personal note, working from home was not an issue but what began to emerge is a very obvious change in my energy levels as I was not used to spending so much time at home. I missed the routine of not having to go out and do my coaching work and coming home feeling I had been productive!

Upon reflecting the lessons learnt, a number of issues have surfaced for me and I share it under the headings of: The Bigger Picture, Family and Friends, My Clients and Work, A Personal Note with What is the "After"?

**The Bigger Picture:** In a time of crisis we expect our political leaders to handle it. We expect transparent and clear communication with a clear understanding of what should be done with a strategy. In Malaysia and due to the political crisis, leadership was absent until the number of cases testing positive began to rise rapidly. As for leaders in business, everyone froze "like a deer caught in the headlights".

**Family and Friends:** It was about connections and keeping the communication channels open. My family with sisters, brothers-in-law, nieces, nephews, grandchildren talk and post in our family WhatsApp group and we have regular Zoom chats. Being present for each other in a collectiveness was nourishing.

**My Clients and Work:** The year started well with a planned workshop on Digital Talents with business partners and my own company was planning a panel discussion with invited industry leaders on the topic, Leading Across Generations. As word spread of cancellations and

postponements, the face-to-face coaching work ceased. However, with the Global European Mentoring and Coaching Council, a Solidarity Coaching Project is taking shape in Nigeria in partnership with an NGO. Lesson learnt is to reconnect, renew and stay focused.

Personal note on ‘What is the “After”?’. Looking at how our political and business leaders are never prepared for a crisis, it is imperative for the coaches and coaching bodies to be the beacon to develop new reimagined ways to cope with the “After”.

# PART 2

## Understanding Coronavirus COVID-19

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### Is peace of mind possible in the midst of chaos?

Fiona Elias

*Former medical director in Saudi Arabia, now living in Sweden*

Today, as coronavirus is sweeping the world, people react in different ways. Many people are afraid. Others are indifferent. Some seem to be striving to save themselves first, perhaps at the expense of others. Some people are showing extraordinary humanity, spontaneous compassion and genuine care.

This brings back memories for me. Coronaviruses have directly impacted me. In 2015, during the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS CoV) outbreak in Saudi Arabia, I was working as the Director of Nursing in a large university hospital in Riyadh. At the time of the initial MERS outbreak, I was the Senior Nurse Director on-call and had to lead a team of around 3,000 nurses through those extraordinary times.

It was 3 am when I got a call; the phone call that nobody ever wants to get. Three patients had died in the last couple of hours in one of the surgical ICUs. My presence was needed at the hospital immediately.

At the unit, I was greeted by ten pairs of eyes. Panicked, scared, exhausted, tear-filled eyes. I had never seen nurses and doctors so afraid. They were terrified of what had killed their patients in a matter of hours. The unit was in a state of chaos: surgical drapes on the floor, the defibrillator and crash carts at the bedsides, equipment everywhere. Three bodies in black body bags were waiting to be moved to the morgue.

The patients had not died as a result of their surgeries. Something else had caused it, but at that time it was unknown to us. My imagination went wild. At first, I thought maybe the drugs had been mixed up. Or perhaps something had happened with the anaesthetic. It even crossed my mind for a split second that somebody was deliberately harming the patients. My imagination made up all sorts of scary worst-case scenarios. But, it was worse than I imagined.

Soon, another two patients in the unit had taken a turn for the worse and were deteriorating rapidly. There was seemingly nothing that modern medicine could do to save them. I panicked too. All my experience as a nurse was of no use.

But what happened next was as startling as it was welcome. My mind cleared. I thought: OK Fee, the last thing you want to do in this situation, is to empower fear and let that fear make the decisions for you.

Panic was replaced by what you might call 'real-time responsive intelligence'. It was a feeling of great relief. Even in the midst of chaos, I realised I could be clear, focused, decisive and peaceful! Within minutes I had sorted out what needed to be done, what I had to do and what the next steps were.

This was the beginning of our MERS CoV journey. The epidemic lasted nine weeks in Saudi Arabia. It changed our lives in so many ways. During these nine weeks, we all experienced a roller coaster of emotions: frustrations, fear, courage, hope and love. I witnessed compassion, caring and true professionalism. I also witnessed death, suffering and tragedy, and tragedies sometimes turned into miracles when the sickest of the sick recovered.

At that time, MERS CoV had a death rate of 42%. That means that almost one in two people with the virus died. More recently the death rate reduced to “only” around 34%.

The virus ripped through our hospital with over 220 patients in hospital infected in a matter of days. At the peak of the epidemic there were over 50 MERS-positive patients in our ICUs. With these numbers, it is easy to understand the palpable fear and panic that the frontline healthcare workers experienced. In addition, the workload was unbelievable; we all worked 18 hours a day and still not everything got done.

All this is to achieve one thing: keeping our people safe to care for others. Not just physically safe, but emotionally safe too. At the end of a shift, our healthcare workers were physically drained and emotionally exhausted. Hours in Personal Protective Equipment is insufferable. It's unbearably hot and our staff were dealing with the sickest of patients. Some days were just horrific. But there was always hope.

Naturally, I felt the pressure from time to time. As it turned out, I became my own teacher during these war-like days. What I learned in the trenches that made a real difference was the importance of maintaining my own equanimity. We all do really well when we are not caught up in our fearful, worried thinking. As humans, we are beautifully made for responsiveness in the moment. It made a crucial difference to physically be with staff as they worked in the units. As department heads, we invited them to share their experiences. Allowing staff to speak freely and with compassion made the biggest difference. I cannot tell how many times I heard nurses say: 'I don't know how to do this; I am afraid I may die here; nobody really cares about me here; I can't take any more'. Although this was not always easy to hear, I also know that if we just listened and cared for them, they'd come back to that centred, grounded place in themselves. And time and time again we saw it happen. When staff had shared their real feelings and concerns, most of them would take a deep breath and say, 'You know... I am OK.'

We set up 'social support' for every nurse or doctor taking care of a MERS-infected patient. One of the ways we did this was through a 'spotter' system where every member of the team had a partner. Qualified nurses and doctors would observe each other as they put on their PPE (personal protective equipment). This ensured they were safe and fully protected. Similarly, when staff were doing high-risk procedures with patients, the spotters would observe to ensure that the staff member didn't inadvertently contaminate themselves.

This support started out as a safety net. However, the effect of people caring for each other in their team was unforeseen. Staff members felt deeper connections. They fell in love with each other – In a platonic way. Team cooperation and respect for one another soared. I am sure this saved lives too.

I am both humbled and grateful for this experience. And I would not trade it for the world. These were daunting times, where mostly everything felt like it was out of our control. Yet I witnessed doctors, nurses and the front-line teams showing great courage in the face of personal danger. I also saw the vulnerability of human beings, the breakdowns, the tears of frustration, the anger, the fear – all that is humans in crisis. Yet there was compassion, inner



strength, resilience and love for each other in those moments. There were days when I cried, got frustrated, angry, and my body was aching exhausted. Moments later, I was back home; settled, grounded, making a joke, in a freer mind, with clarity, resilience and hope.

During those 9 weeks of the outbreak, the sun would still rise every day, the birds in my backyard continued to sing, our hearts continued to beat, and our lungs continued to breathe. Life was still fully alive.

We got through to the other side, back to 'normality', if there is such a thing. For many of us, we did not only *go* through the experience, we *grew* through the experience. We are wiser too. But what still moves me is how life throws up leaders and heroes in moments of crisis.

We can be so responsive in the moment. We are designed to respond in the moment using our wisdom, insight and clarity. When in 'scary' situations we can easily lose that presence, clarity and balance if we believe our uncomfortable feelings, reacting rather than taking things in our stride. We learned to be comfortable with uncomfortable feelings. We were all there in it together.

It is absolutely possible to have peace of mind and clarity in the midst of chaos. In fact, that is what keeps us safe, focused, helps make the right decisions, and allows us to be there for others with compassion and care. It boils down to one question: in challenging times do you know how to find your way back home to yourself?

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## In common with most people

Alice McVeigh

*Anglo-American author, cellist and editor, recovered from coronavirus, London, United Kingdom*

In common with most people, I've had a couple of close brushes with death. When I was five and living in Bangkok – my father was in the US State Department – I was tricycling gleefully down the drive when I suddenly found my path blocked... by a massive snake. Well, even at five, I wasn't stupid. I abandoned my tricycle and ran screaming to the servants, several of whom took care of the python.

A bit later, in my twenties, two fellow musicians of the Opera 80 Orchestra and I, on a day off, were enjoying the Lake District. The winds were whipped and icy but still we walked and were in rosy high spirits as we returned to the car. However, just as the driver set off down the hill, the wheels hit a patch of black ice. To our utter horror, the car slid out of control and skidded – fast – towards the edge of a precipice: the longest couple of seconds of my entire life. The car stopped a whisker from the edge of perhaps a 40 foot drop. It took us all a good hour to stop shaking.

My coronavirus experience wasn't nearly as bad as either of these, or a couple of other near-misses I've had. Mine was a moderate case. I wasn't one of those lucky bunnies who toss out a couple of dry coughs and never know they'd had it – but I never got as far as hospital, let alone intensive care. Instead, I endured an awful 7-8 hours of breathing difficulties; 4 days of unrelenting temperatures between 38-40°C; the most bizarre cough of my life – nothing to

cough up; and a pincer-like headache that refused to shift with any permissible amount of Paracetamol.

I called the NHS helpline, as advertised, about 3 a.m. one night, when it seemed as if that long-dead python had tracked me down at last. The guy said, 'If your breathing gets any worse, call us back. For now, just keep breathing.'

And yet, in some ways, even though I'm fine, what's going on now feels every bit as scary as those long, endless seconds in the Lake District, skidding towards the abyss.

Will my husband – older than me – or our daughter get it? Will her boyfriend – trapped here instead of in his native Tokyo by my illness – get it? (He's yet to confess to his parents that I've had it.) Will the NHS cope? Will the economy cope? Will my fellow zero-hour-contract friends – musicians, dancers and actors with every performance for the foreseeable future cancelled – cope?

When will the great British public start thinking as a nation and not as millions of selfish individuals to whom the rules of social distancing need not apply? Will this crisis – the greatest peacetime crisis for centuries – make or break us, as a society, as an economy, as a people, as a world?

We're all going to have to dig deep. And keep breathing.

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## **Advice from a junior doctor on the NHS front line**

**Dr Imogen Heaton**

*In the middle of her first year as a junior doctor, Imogen found herself working on an acute medical ward in the midst of the coronavirus crisis, West Midlands, United Kingdom*

Coronavirus sucks. There are no two ways about it. As a doctor working on the acute medical ward, I am on the front line caring for the patients that have been most affected by this disease. We see them as they come into the hospital and must make quick and brutal decisions about whether a person should be taken to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) if they deteriorate. A lot of the patients are already frail or have underlying health conditions – in these cases, we have to say that they will not benefit from an ICU admission. We do our best for them on the wards, treating actively where appropriate.

A lot of the time all we can do is make people comfortable. We always have to make difficult decisions for our patients; however, the crisis means we have to make tough decisions more often and earlier than we normally would. Already, we are seeing a rise in patients being treated palliatively. We have already lost a significant number of patients to this disease. It's tough.

Being on the front line at the moment is emotionally demanding as we have to tell patients and their families, often over the phone due to visiting restrictions, that there is very little we can do for them and we anticipate they will not survive this disease. It is also physically draining as we don personal protective equipment every time we go to see our patients: the masks make it harder to breathe and the gloves and constant hand washing has made my hands

crack. The masks and visors are there to protect us so we can continue to look after future patients, but it makes it feel very impersonal as we deliver bad news through a plastic sheet.

Through all of this though, I have never been more grateful for my amazing colleagues. The team spirit on the ward has strengthened as we face this together. Every day we check in with each other, asking if we are OK (and wanting a genuine answer), making each other cups of tea when upset, having team debriefings after significant events so we all have time to process what is happening. No one expected this, no one was prepared, but the resilience of people astounds me. We all continue to come to work every day and put our patients first despite the risks to ourselves. I am prouder than ever to work in the NHS alongside these incredible nurses, healthcare workers, cleaners, porters and other doctors.

How can you help to do your bit amidst this crisis? Firstly, you need to do your bit to prevent the spread of this disease. Our understanding of the disease is increasing every day, but we are still fighting it blind to some extent. We do, however, know that it is spread by droplets that can live in the air for several hours and on surfaces for up to a few days. It is, therefore, important to wash your hands, especially when food shopping or when preparing food.

Social distancing is also so important. You may not have symptoms but who knows if you are asymptotically carrying it, or have the virus on your clothes; you might then pass it round to a friend without realising, and that friend then visits their mother and passes it on again. There is only so much we can do to stop this disease, but we can slow it down. Hospitals and Intensive Therapy Unit departments are already reaching their capacity; you need to give us a chance to cope with all the extra patients we will get. If they all come at once there simply won't be enough staff, beds or equipment to look after everyone. We need to flatten the curve. So please stay home as much as possible, limit your food shopping and outside activity.

But sitting at home all day on your sofa can be much harder than it sounds. We all appreciate that. While we do it to protect our physical health, we must equally try to protect our mental health. While sitting at home, surrounded by the news, it is hard to think of anything other than coronavirus; it leads to high levels of anxiety, loneliness and fear. We are all feeling like this, you are not alone. Please reach out to people, call a friend, message a family member, facetime your partner. Ask someone how they are and really mean it. Try to verbalise how you are feeling and share it with a loved one. Don't forget to let people know how much they mean to you and how grateful you are for them. I'm sure I am not the only one moved to tears by the clapping for the NHS event.

It is also important to try and detach from talking or thinking about coronavirus at least once a day. I think practising meditation or mindfulness can really help in times like this. There are lots of resources online to help with this: try a YouTube video or download an app to help guide you through it. Go on a walk or a run to make sure you are getting a bit of fresh air and a change of scenery each day. Watch your favourite TV programme or film and get engrossed in the lives of familiar characters.

I know a lot of people are particularly worried about what to do if they start to get symptoms. The advice changes all the time so I cannot give you hard and fast rules here. The main symptoms are fever and a dry cough or shortness of breath. If you are feeling these symptoms you should not leave the house. The best thing to do is visit the NHS 111 website – they are constantly updating this with the latest advice. However, if you are very short of

breath and struggling to breathe, you still need to call 999. If you feel you have mild flu or cold-like symptoms then take regular paracetamol (two tablets, four times a day) and make sure you are isolating yourself, even from others in your house. If you need to share a bathroom with someone else, make sure you wipe down the surfaces with a disinfectant wipe afterwards to try and prevent passing it on.

There is a lot of conflicting advice flying around the internet about the coronavirus. I have heard a lot of rumours that are not true and not helpful. For example, please don't start drinking extra-hot tea to 'kill the virus before it gets to your lungs'; this will just burn your mouth! Please don't waste your money on any 'miracle cures' or preventative drinks you see advertised online. These scams definitely won't help and they may do some harm. Only trust reputable sources, i.e. the government or NHS websites. If the information comes from your friend's cousin's boyfriend who may or may not work in a hospital or the civil service, it is probably untrue!

Stay safe everyone, look after each other and don't forget to have hope.

# PART 3

## Conquering Social Isolation

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### Disabling self-isolation as a liberation to think

Dr Paul Darke

*Artist, and CEO of Outside Centre (Disability Organisation)*

We all often consider taking time out for ourselves; well, this is that moment. What do we want to do with that time out? Well, this is our opportunity to figure that out too. This current enforced 'isolation' and 'social distancing' is the time to acquaint yourself with, yes, yourself and your own capacity to merely – purely – think: question, examine, ponder, plan, play and act on your own life. Now, more than ever, is the time to get your life and head sorted. If not now, then when?

As a disabled person who was told they would be dead at 15 (I am now 58), I fought the idea of a future for decades. As an atheist, it all seemed rather pointless. And, as an atheist, I think it is pointless. But, and it is a very big but, that does not mean one should give up. Quite the opposite: today, tomorrow and the future is all there is. So live it and live it well. Again, as a disabled person, that is often easier to say rather than actually do. The aim though is to try.

Isolation is, for many disabled people including myself, a way of life. We are routinely excluded from everyday life by society at large and by friends, loved ones and family. It may not be intentional, or done with any degree of awareness, yet it is an everyday reality that could easily turn into fear, hate and bitterness. It can be a fight every day to not succumb to the emotion of isolation, but we try. To win that fight the key is primarily to value yourself and value your own thoughts and feelings as real, valid and true. Own yourself: recognise the world as it is and recognise that it is not going to change any day soon.

Only you can make a change in your life in the short term to have a significant impact on your own life. It is only when you recognise this that you can start to move forward. Political change is a much longer process, with many setbacks along the way, but even that should be an essential part of your plan for change. You can change yourself and you can change the world. (The world changes every day because of you – make it a positive change).

Being disabled, in isolation, should make us all realise the need we have for one another and helping each other is essential for being the best we can be. For example, you are reading this: another's perspectives; I write this for me and you, I write this for us, I live for me and I live for us.

Define your own world as best you can. A key for me is to not engage in the battle for your mind-space that is being waged around you in social media, mainstream media and social norms. Give up social media especially – it is not you or your narrative but other people's narratives of you or themselves – connect with real people. This is an opportunity for us all to forge our own path. The future path you have dreamed for yourself, you can now plot and plan.

Create your own narrative for now and the future: isolation is the opportunity to just do it. This isolation is your opportunity to understand yourself and to empathise and put yourself in the place of others in a similar position (such as disabled people).

As a disabled person – a wheelchair user – I have spent many days, totalling years, in hospitals, doctors' and consultants' waiting rooms, and in lifts, quite literally just thinking and living in my own head trying to understand who I am and how and why I think like I do. It works and it liberates you from the fear and terror that seemingly waits around every corner of ordinary life and in the ordinariness of daily life.

When you think about your life, as we are all interconnected even in isolation, we are thinking of other's lives and thoughts. What a joy to be able to think of others even when in isolation. Just make sure you remember what you thought when you get out and meet one another again, to not just change your life but to change others' lives and to change the world one day at a time.

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## The silent scream of incarceration

Nikki J. Owen

*Formerly prisoner DO2572, United Kingdom*

On 22nd December 1978, aged 18, I was in the dock at The Old Bailey, charged with arson, endangering life, and intent to kill my mother. During my early teens my behaviour had become increasingly violent, culminating in burning down the family home. I was sent to Holloway Prison and because of my volatile rages I was incarcerated in solitary confinement. Years of self-harming, a shaved head, scars from slashed wrists and a 30kg weight gain had transformed me into 'a monster'. Up until my early teens I had been part of a loving family and was a talented dancer who used to do part-time modelling to earn a bit of cash.

My parents couldn't understand what had triggered their gentle eldest daughter to suddenly appear violent, irrational and without self-control. They decided to invite eight of the UK's most well-respected psychiatrists to examine me in Holloway Prison.

Their reports were chilling, left no hope for my recovery, and described me as '...incurably insane', '...a danger to society', and '...a maniacal psychopath'. They collectively recommended that I serve a life sentence in Broadmoor, the hospital for the criminally insane. When the prison governor at Holloway told me about the application for me to go to Broadmoor, I felt the tiny flicker of light within me extinguish. My cell was tiny. For some reason I was kept in darkness. My prison dress was made from indestructible material so I couldn't rip it up and hang myself. I was given a mattress to sleep on, but no blanket, and I was fed through a hatch in the door twice a day. I was held in this darkness for several months, only being allowed out once a week so that I could write a letter home. I stopped being Nicola Jane Owen and became Prisoner DO2572.

Reflecting on those months in that dark, tiny prison cell has helped me to see that what I experienced then, all those years ago, is something that many of the population are feeling right now as the prospect of a national lockdown becomes more real.

As the world experiences a catastrophic shake up, people are at different stages of coming to terms with their new reality. As the panic fuelled by the media rises its ugly head, I am mindful of the stark contrasts that we are seeing. People who have saved hard all their life watch helplessly as their savings and investments disappear. Brave individuals who provide vital services, such as supermarket staff and medical teams are knowingly placing themselves at risk every time they show up for work. Panic buyers, whose trolleys are laden with toilet rolls and pastas, march past the bewildered elderly who stare at the empty shelves. People whose livelihoods have been destroyed in days, small businesses that were started with such hope and optimism and even people who others may perceive as 'sitting pretty' feeling broken as economic markets plunge in the face of an unprecedented global crisis.

Fear causes you to close down and lock yourself away from the danger that you perceive is 'out there'. The more scared you feel, the more you bury yourself into the dark depths of your unconscious mind. You are effectively incarcerating yourself in a dark place. After a while you adjust to where you are. The longer you stay in that dark place, the more you normalise that state – which is not your innate natural state at all! So, the real lockdown is not the constraint of civil liberties but the fear you create inside your head that causes this sense of isolation.

When you work too hard, your body indicates that it wants to rest. If you ignore the cries from your body, you'll experience an increase in your suffering. This imbalance is not a problem if it is experienced for a day or so, but if your life is out of balance over a longer period, your natural equilibrium is thrown into disarray. Your inner imbalance creates tension that causes you to 'fight the flow of life'. Your inner balance creates an ease that allows you to 'go with the flow of life'. As the Beatles famously sang: Let it Be.

The transition from frantic busy lives to nothing much to do is a huge adjustment. The best way to deal with self-isolation and lockdown is accepting that it is, for the foreseeable future, part of your daily routine. True liberation is not physical anyway, because your mind and your imagination are only constrained by the thoughts you choose to think in any given moment. Rather than looking at what you can't do anymore, focus on what you can do. This enforced pause holds a powerful opportunity to create something that you did not previously have time to do. Whether it's embracing meditation, writing that book you've always promised to write or learning how to cook. This is a moment that offers the chance for deep self-reflection as you receive the gift of time.

From my cell in Holloway prison I discovered that nothing is permanent. As I learned to quieten my own mind, I recalled wonderful memories when I was blissfully happy. The darkness showed me that the key to freedom is accessible in each of us. No warden, no wall, no locked door could stop me from feeling uplifted and inspired. Incarceration is a choice, how you choose to perceive this situation will either lock up your thinking or expand your passion for life itself.

Stay free!

In the midst of the chaos and uncertainty, what can you do to help you to manage these difficult times?

Recognise that no matter how scared you feel, fear does not help you in any way. It lowers your immune system, stops you from thinking clearly and creates a resistance to noticing that which is positive in your life. The media spews reports on reasons to be scared and this relentless point of focus generates an increased fear within us. As we feed this fear it gathers a

momentum, like an express train building up speed. There comes a point when the momentum of fear is so great that it's almost impossible to stop.

The knack is to prevent your own express train of fear gathering any speed. To do this requires you to change what you're paying attention to. When you change the way you look at things, those things you look at change. Imagine looking down at a fish swimming in a pond and ask yourself how differently is the fish's perspective of the world? Ultimately the only thing that is real is the perspective you hold inside your mind. This perspective is always inaccurate and incomplete because your mind can never process everything that is really going on.

Right now, many of you are transmitting on the fear frequency that means you can only receive those things on the frequency of fear. You do have the power to change your frequency and this decision can stop the express train of fear right now. Change how you feel and you change what you notice out there in the world.

Find reasons to feel good right now. Make friends with the situation right now. Look for reasons to feel grateful right now. Whether you meditate, follow Wim Hof's breathwork, practice yoga, write, read or home-school your kids, do anything that feels good and notice the speed with which your life can change. When you start each day with a focus on what's good then your express train of fear never gets to leave the station.

As Rudyard Kipling famously wrote in his inspiring poem; "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs..." One day you and I will look back on this historic moment and we will see that everything we experienced now gave us the opportunity to define the person we are destined to become.

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## It's good to talk

Liz Walder

*Cardiff, United Kingdom*

What sets us apart within the animal kingdom is our ability to talk, listen and engage. Key to the development of the human being is the power of speech.

Yet in the fast-paced twenty-first-century world, sometimes we have lost the power of speech. We engage with our smartphones and our mobile devices. We decline to use our voice box for its purpose. Our communication has become the written word and our context has become a hunch over an electronic device. We remain silent to our peer groups and friends. Our verbal communication has reduced and can be, in some cases, non-existent.

The internet has brought this change to our lives. We have embraced technology completely. Our high streets are dying because we now trade online: for leisure, retail, food. Gone are the days of commuting to work for many, in a 9-5 job. Instead, we now have the means to work from home, at all hours of the day, on any day of the week.

To reduce the spread of the coronavirus, we have been encouraged to self-isolate and remain in our home. This is our challenge. Self-isolation means we must remain alone, on our own, although some may stay with their close family. Contact with more than a single other person is discouraged because of the health risks of spreading the virus.



To stay safe, we must embrace self-isolation coupled with the agility of technology. We must reignite the flame of conversation, we must engage with each other, and wink over wifi. The selfishness of solitude could be our undoing in the face of such adversity.

Mass gatherings of people are discouraged, but taking part in a gym session via your laptop is not. For the less energetic, yoga and pilates are available. Exercise is available to us all. Walking a dog, chatting with a neighbour across the street, playing music from your balcony, sharing your love of your hobby with others: it is all possible in this most trying of circumstances.

Help groups are being set up all over the internet. A range of interaction platforms are setting up online communities and support networks for everyone. Whatever your situation, wherever you are, please join in. There is a community online for everyone. We cannot be alone in this loneliest of challenges.

I urge you to regain your speech. To interact, to engage. Use your smartphone, mobile device and laptop to speak to your community and the world. Become vocal. Become verbal.

Seek me online and tell me your story. I am ready to hear you.

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## Isolation – a poem

Ralph Jones

*United Kingdom*

Sitting here in isolation  
Locked away from this virus infecting our nation  
Prime Minister on our television screens  
Supermarkets rationing toilet rolls and baked beans

News reports showing deserted cities  
Hospitals running to full capacity  
Army on standby  
Aeroplanes unable to fly

As this virus enters town after town  
Bars and clubs recommended to close down  
The whole world it seems is in relapse  
Economy on the brink of collapse

Gymnasiums to close, no more fitness kicks!  
Community centres, close, no more tea and bics?  
Coffee shops closed, except for takeaway  
Government promising to compensate workers' pay

Experts telling us about the social contact you make  
People elbow bumping, instead of handshakes  
Wash your hands, keep yourself clean  
Is this just basic hygiene?

But this is hygiene on a higher alert  
We are not talking about grease or dirt  
This is a killer virus  
A virus that can kill the vulnerable amongst us

Restaurants, bars and clubs must close we are told  
To help stop this virus getting a hold  
With elderly people being told to stay indoors  
Maybe for three months or more!

Supermarkets shelves being stripped bare  
With no sanitising projects there  
Toilet paper being bought like it's going out of fashion!  
Baby foods being stockpiled, by people with no compassion

But go to the online auction sites  
The prices have more than tripled overnight  
These people who prey on the vulnerable for greed  
At a time when we should be helping those in need

Where have the days of community spirit gone  
We should be helping those with nobody to depend on  
The aged, the disabled, the mentally infirm, those all alone  
So, we can't visit, but we can pick up the phone

See an ambulance driver in a white gown and a mask!  
Going about his everyday tasks  
Tell your friends about what you just saw  
It could have been a scene from a nuclear war

Doctors and nurses almost on the floor  
Schools told to close their doors  
Parents to keep children at home  
It could be a scene from home alone

But this is no film, this is a living nightmare  
A killer virus is out there  
We have all got to pull together  
Before this virus puts us all in isolation forever

So, let's all stop this panic buying  
Let's give the message that we all are trying  
The doctors and the nurses also need to eat  
And if we all pull together, this is an enemy we can beat

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## Fair winds

Will Carnegie

*United Kingdom*

It was a New Year's Eve that we knew we would never forget. The Southern Cross sparkled above us like a diamond necklace among a backdrop of billions of stars. Nine hundred miles to the south of us, above the landmass of Antarctica, the Aurora Australis danced, stirring a primal sense of awe.

Yet amid this I felt an increasing sense of isolation, anxiety and uncertainty. It was 2001 and I was the skipper of a 22-metre racing yacht and, along with the crew of seventeen, on the third leg of a round-the-world-race called the BT Global Challenge. This section of the race would take us from Buenos Aires to Wellington and, at over six thousand miles, would mean being at sea over a thousand miles from land, for around forty days.

We were now about eighteen days into this mammoth leg and had not even reached the halfway point; we'd already faced two major storms, temperatures now regularly dipped below freezing and, with a sea temperature of between 3°C and 5°C, should anyone have fallen overboard they would almost certainly have lost their lives. Social media didn't exist, we were a long way from our loved ones and we felt it. The weight of responsibility sat heavily on my 27-year-old shoulders.

Through this uncertainty and isolation we slowly evolved and developed our own coping strategies. Some of these strategies were new and others were as old as the ships that had plied these routes hundreds of years ago.

- Routine. Create your own certainty through routine; it is sometimes all you have and without it your days will become a muddle of overlapping tasks, unstructured bursts of activity and periods of intense boredom. Each day at sea was structured around a system of watches (shifts). Within that cycle of daily life we created simple routines, including a morning handover between watches and a lunchtime 'all hands' meeting where the entire team would meet to share a meal and exchange information. As time progressed we introduced additional activities into this briefing including our infamous kangaroo court. A team member suspected of a minor crime, such as not washing-up a mug or worst of all stealing rations, would be tried by their fellow crew mates and when inevitably found guilty, face a minor punishment such as cleaning the heads (toilet). The monotony and repetitive nature of daily life at sea meant that it was important to mark the passing of each week. One team introduced a Sunday service where, regardless of

faith, the crew came together to have a good sing-song and remember their loved ones many thousands of miles from them.

- Punctuate the boredom. As time evolved, we realised the importance of creating events to look forward to. These included a mini Olympics on one of the warmer legs, which involved press-ups, sit-ups and various other physical challenges. Halfway parties where we recognised the symbolism of turning over the chart, and looking ahead to the second half of the leg became eagerly anticipated.
- Look to history. History is full of examples of humans achieving extraordinary things during intense periods of isolation. Much of my inspiration came from Ernest Shackleton, the famous Antarctic explorer. On one section of our race, light winds had frustrated progress and low food supplies were creating angst in the team. I gathered everyone on deck and read a short passage detailing how Shackleton and his team had overwintered in Antarctica in extreme isolation with very limited supplies. In addition to reading the passage, one of my crew and I created eighteen necklaces on each of which we hung a tiny strip of leather (usually used for sail repairs). Inspired by the story of Shackleton's men chewing on boot leather during their darkest periods of hunger, each team member was given one of these necklaces to symbolise our ability to manage in the trying circumstances.
- This day will end. This became a very personal mantra during some of my darkest hours. I could not know how the toughest days would end, whether the weather would be better or worse, or whether we would have lost or gained ground, but I could be sure that it would end and that another day would begin.

And so too will this day end.

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## Dealing with the unknown in times of change

Andy Matheson

*Portsmouth, United Kingdom*

Helen worked in an office and the place was alive with people. There was a buzz as colleagues collided in corridors and coffee was consumed over smiles and conversation. She spent nearly eight hours a day in this environment and, when she added her commute, she found a large percentage of her time was dedicated to work and office life.

Work gave her meaning, it provided friendships, colleagues, and connections. In fact, as Helen thought about it, she realised that work was in fact one of the most substantial factors in her life. Sure it could be annoying at times and not every day was joyous but the majority of days were fulfilling and she would look forward to seeing what each new day might bring.

One day Boris Johnson, Britain's prime minister, came on TV and pulled the rug from under her normality. 'Work from home' her boss said and she was given access codes and video conferencing.

Helen had so many questions. How long would this last? What would happen to her company? Was her job safe? Would she be made redundant soon? Was she going to get sick? Would she have to cancel her holiday?

She went home and her mind began to race. She was normally quite an optimist but her head went into dark places. She began to speculate about her future where she was unemployed living in a deserted town where no-one moved around and tumbleweed spun out of control past boarded-up shops. Her hair had lost its colour, her friends had gone and the world had become grey and uninviting.

One day something happened that made a difference to her. She was on her laptop and it sprang to life. It was her old boss from her previous company checking to see how she was. She took the opportunity to unload her concerns and dumped all her questions on him. She demanded answers and wanted to know what he could do to sort things out for her.

He listened hard and when she had finished he said a few things that resonated.

'No one has the answers you are seeking' he said. 'It is not possible to give you any reassurance at all. There are so many conflicting pieces of information that it is impossible to navigate through to a common truth. You have to live with that reality and that uncertainty. The question is not "when will this be over?" but "how do I get through these vague and difficult times knowing that things are going to be confusing for a while".'

He then asked her a question and paused: 'When have you been uncertain in life and things have felt out of control?'. Helen could think of a couple of moments when her life had been at a very low ebb. Problems with boyfriends were top of the list when she was unexpectedly dumped and left hung out to dry.

'How did you deal with it?' he asked. Helen reflected that she never did get to the bottom of the reasons behind the ending of relationships but she had learnt to cope with the change and the uncertainty it generated. Friends were important, coming to terms with it were important, and putting on a brave face and facing the challenge certainly helped.

He went on to say: 'When you don't have information, you tend to create a reality that becomes real to you. In tough times, we can find ourselves creating pictures that are bleak, the very worst case scenarios, and we respond emotionally as if they are real. If you talk to your friends who are feeling depressed you will probably find they are in part causing their own downward spiral of emotions by focussing on the very worst possible outcomes'.

Then he said something that really helped. 'I will give you a guarantee. Life over the next few weeks is going to be awful. The news will be terrible, Boris won't bring a smile to your face and your friends will be concerned and worried. It will be shit.'

Helen responded that this was hardly cheering her up but her boss explained something.

'When people go into hospital for an operation a surgeon has a couple of choices. One of them is to say: "You will soon feel better and be back on your feet" or "when you wake up you will experience pain and discomfort for at least four weeks". So the person goes to hospital, has the operation and then wakes up. Which advice from the surgeon has the best impact on the patient?' he asked.

Helen thought about it and realised that the honest, realistic advice was more comforting. Those waking up and expecting pain and discomfort were able to deal with it much more easily. Those who expected to be fine were shocked and worried by how bad they felt.

‘It is interesting that the recovery rates from patients who are told the truth about the aftermath of an operation report recovering much more rapidly than those under the illusion that all will be fine. What I am saying’, he said ‘is that life is going to be uncertain, unpleasant, vague and disconcerting for a while. But now that you know that perhaps you can live with it. I can’t fix that reality but what I can do is to suggest you do things that make you feel able to deal with it. Connect with people, eat well, drink plenty of water, sleep well, chat to people and keep your mind active. Don’t expect things to be better for a while and don’t expect instant answers to your many questions. Just remember that it will be alright in the end ... and if it is not alright then it is not the end”.

# PART 4

## Mastering Mind and Body

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### How to avoid getting stuck in crisis mode

Lindsey Agness

*Sandwich, Kent, UK*

I am writing this from my own home where we were put into effective 'lockdown' last night. My husband reluctantly closed the doors of his coffee shop exactly six years from the day he opened it – how coincidental is that? For the first time since 2005, when I started my consulting business, I have no work other than a few online coaching sessions. So, this represents the biggest shift in our daily lives ever, and the future of our businesses is uncertain.

Social media is currently swamped with tips about how to deal with the crisis, I wonder whether most people are following them. They are not alone because information by itself does not get people to change their behaviour. We have had many examples of this in recent days. I want to explore why it is so hard for human beings to change their behaviour on such a scale, and, at such pace. And what can be done to help you create a sustainable, positive, mindset and increased resilience.

In a crisis our routine goes out of the window, which causes many of us to go into information overload along with high stress levels. It feels a bit like attention deficit disorder (ADD) as we find we can't focus or concentrate on anything for very long. Have you felt like this over the last few days?

From a psychological perspective, we all have our unconscious habits and routines. In fact, Duke University measured in 2006 that at least 40% of our behaviours are entirely unconscious. This means that when we are triggered by certain things we behave in a certain way. For example, every morning before I leave for work, I have toast and coffee for breakfast before catching the 6.30 am train to London. So, when I am told to stay at home, and I can't go to the office I am rapidly thrown off course. The first thing we can all do is to recreate a feeling of stability in our lives and a structure to our day, especially now many of us are spending all day in the same place.

This situation also creates a feeling of fear in many people. We are scared of being hurt, we are scared of the economy, we are scared of not being in control, and now we are even scared of each other. What can we do differently, starting today?

#### Creating a new routine

The risk when in fear mode is that we feel stuck and end up doing what we know isn't good for us – such as spending all day eating and watching Netflix. So, in our house we have been

creating a new routine. It is keeping to a similar timetable to ensure we all get enough sleep. Sleep is needed for resilience. I make sure that I do my physical exercises followed by a full day in the home office, working on priority tasks that I can do to ensure my business can survive into the future. I stop at the 'normal' time and then have the evening for watching Netflix, reading and so on. Start by asking yourself: 'What is a normal day for me, even in isolation?' This will start to recreate stability and structure. Do it consciously and feel good about it.

### **Thinking and Feeling Differently**

Also, very important is to be aware of what you are focusing on. Our thoughts drive how we feel, which ultimately drives our behaviour and our results. Ask yourself: 'Where is my focus right now?' Is it on the problem of Covid-19 and fake news? Or, is it on the opportunity for innovation and doing things differently in your life and your business?

### **'Where focus goes, energy flows'**

In my business, I am having daily brain-storming calls with my fellow directors to explore how to take the business online and offer value now. This helps me to feel good about the future and motivates me to take action!

Keep a daily journal to build your own awareness of what is going on in your focus and internal conversations – much of this internal dialogue will be unconscious. It is important to build conscious awareness so you can begin to create new behaviours. Experiment incorporating 'positive affirmations' into your new normal day. If many times a day you are repeating some sort of 'I can, I will' mantra in your head you will start to shift your thoughts about what is possible for you.

### **"Change your thoughts. Change your life."**

If you feel yourself going into a negative state, for an immediate shift in how you feel do something physical like going for a walk or simply getting up, getting moving, standing up straight and smiling.

Finally, we are in unprecedented times that call for as many of us as possible to keep strong and positive to make the best out of this situation. We can also use what we know to help and support others through this. I hope these ideas inspire you to start now to build a new routine in your life and to think and feel more positively about the future.

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## **Collaboration in the health and fitness industry**

**Colin Gill**

*Bristol and Swansea, United Kingdom*

Increasing restrictions imposed by the UK government over the weeks following the first reported cases of Covid-19 were intended to reduce the number of people in the community congregating in public. At first the restrictions included closing bars and restaurants. Health and fitness businesses saw a dramatic drop in people visiting their centres and one by one they



were closing. This is when the more ingenious in the health and fitness industry started to move their businesses online. As the founder of Brave Lifestyle, a community interest company based in the UK, I had also begun to ready a studio space with recording equipment and lighting to take my community health interventions from physical face-to-face interactions to virtual classes.

This would not have been possible previously as the technology was not available, but the mobile phone devices we have in the palms of our hands now have the required capability. Advances in technology allow everyone to reach out to a worldwide audience with Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and others to market their services. However, from my observations, everyone appeared to be working independently. Similar to the incomprehensible stockpile shopping and hoarding of goods that saw supermarket shelves stripped of toilet paper, bread, and pasta, health and fitness professionals were adopting an every-man-for-himself approach: a survival of the fittest mentality.

Over 20 years in the health and fitness industry, and as a sports coach, I appreciate the importance of “collaboration vs. competition” if your team (your ideology) is to succeed. In business the advantage of a collaborative approach overcomes the restriction of individuals only being able to cast their net over a certain audience. Collaboration with others (particularly when the services each are providing are different) widens the audience, and the area over which you can market each of your services. A more visionary approach, from a leader with mentoring and coaching qualities, can galvanise people to work together. At Brave Lifestyle we had that visionary approach as soon as the first case of Covid-19 came to the UK and we studied the clinical epidemiology in China, Italy, and Spain. We contacted a variety of health and fitness professionals who provide a valuable service and who had the right mentality and shared ethos to help the community keep physically and mentally healthy during the troubling Covid-19 times ahead. We built collaborative incentives in the group and began advertising all the online services we were delivering in one timetable across three cities (Swansea, Cardiff, and Bristol). Under the Brave Lifestyle Community Health Interventions banner we marketed and promoted online exercise and wellbeing activities such as meditation and yoga because we anticipated mental health issues skyrocketing as public stress, anxiety, and depression worsened. Our collective audiences benefit from several exercise and wellbeing activities every day of the week.

I have been delivering health promotions to the public through community health interventions for children and adults for 15 years in various local authority and community roles. I have built up a reputation for my approach to community health both locally and internationally. I hope this collaborative, as opposed to competitive, approach is replicated in the coming months across the UK and other nations as governments try to keep their citizens safe with lockdown and quarantine measures. After all, as British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said in his Downing Street press release on Sunday 22nd March 2020: “It is crucial for people’s physical and mental wellbeing that they get out in the fresh air and exercise in open spaces and parks... however, it is absolutely critical to observe the social distancing advice and everyone must act responsibly”.

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## The immunity of community: how compassion moves us from surviving to thriving in times of uncertainty

Jamie Tott

*Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK*

Many people sighed with relief at the economic countermeasures announced by the Treasury when Covid-19 finally got real. What caught the nation's attention were the closing words of Chancellor Rishi Sunak's address: "Now, more than at any time in our history, we will be judged by our capacity for compassion. Our ability to come through this won't just be down to what the government or businesses do, but by the individual acts of kindness that we show each other."

Messages from the Prime Minister such as 'Stay at Home', 'Save Lives', 'Social distancing' and 'Self-isolation' affected us at a deep neurological level. Way down in the feeling centre of our brains is the amygdala. Its one job is fight-or-flight: the process that alerts us to threats and the need for self-preservation. Its downfall is its original design intent to protect us from predators. Therefore it has only two settings: tiger/no tiger. When we sense our environment shift away from comfortable norms, the amygdala goes full tiger. It floods our bloodstream with stress chemicals, adrenaline and cortisol, raising the pulse, shortening breath, prioritising blood flow to the major muscle groups. This is great for running and fighting, not so brilliant for thinking and resilience.

We might view the behaviours that result from this auto-response as being driven by an inner primate who is far less rational than our human side, like panic buying and stock-piling when the Government reassures people that essential supply lines are safe or going out to enjoy ourselves when we are advised to stay home, travel less and maintain distance from others.

Compassion literally means to 'suffer with' and in modern usage typically includes the intent to relieve the pain of others. The need for compassion is rarely so profound as it is now. People the world over are experiencing pain of one sort or another. Some are trying as hard as they can to keep businesses running in the most challenging circumstances. Others are coping with the realities of company closures and what that means for their future.

All of this is happening to people who are confined to their homes where additional worries are unfolding: the wellbeing of close family and friends who we are restricted from visiting; the meeting of financial obligations with little or no income; the need to home-school children and the search for basic provisions.

As the latest science shows us, simply choosing to understand and care for another person, to take actions for the benefit of their wellbeing, is enough to activate a physiological response that runs counter to fight-or-flight. The arousal of compassion switches a circuit in our brains that releases the cuddle chemicals oxytocin and vasopressin, reducing blood pressure, increasing immune system functioning and producing feelings of hope and optimism.

Compassion is innate in all of us and it's easier to act on than you might think. Here are a couple of tips to get you started.

### **Tip 1: Clear your own mind**

We are all susceptible to thinking and behaving irrationally. Having compassion for others starts with compassion for ourselves. Identify whom you trust and can turn to for sharing your own sources of suffering. Favour people who will listen without judgement (see Tip 2).

In times like these, when people you need may be out of reach, try cathartic writing. Wake up, get up, sit down and write. Keep going until you hit three full pages of blather. If you get stuck, as you will, write about being stuck until the next wave of thought occurs; and it will. Never judge the content or quality of the writing. Just close the book and get on with your day. This is guaranteed to make the mental load feel lighter. If you persist for several days or weeks, you will almost certainly notice an improved capacity for managing your own mood. This will create the space you need to be there for others.

### **Tip 2: Listen without judgement**

How often do you listen deeply to someone else? That means being fully present, focused on their words and mannerisms, suspending your own judgement and pushing aside your thoughts; not planning what you want to say next. It's listening to understand, not to give advice. How often do you do that? Whatever your answer, do it more. Try this to get you started:

- Ask someone: "What's on your mind today?"
- Focus on their thoughts by repeating or visualising their words in your mind
- Hold the silences, give them time and space to think - it's about them
- If a prompt is needed, simply ask "And what else is on your mind?"
- Keep going until they have nothing else

This alone will be enough to help most people see and feel more clearly.

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## **How might we learn and change to become more certain in uncertain times?**

**Edward Gordon-Lennox**

*Gloucester, UK*

As a change and leadership partner and coach, my work has all but evaporated in the last week, and yet we are probably about to go through enormous change as a nation. For the last eight days I have been helping paint the kitchen at home, and now, finally, the chance to think and write...

We know what the threats are – the loss of life as we know it, life itself, socialism, economic degradation, environmental destruction and the significant consequences of human uncertainty... not to mention varying degrees of anxiety at a personal level, team tensions, some organisational extinction and a monumental national debt for years to come. How scary and uncertain is that? We do though have a choice as to how to respond, and well beyond the sharing of hundreds of amusing videos and online data we are currently choosing to engage with the topic every day.

So, let us start a movement that accepts the current and emergent reality of Covid-19, but seeks to kick out the virus of uncertainty. Uncertainty and anxiety around here is real but not high. Where is my next fee coming from? Will elderly neighbours conform to the rules? Will a much-loved grandfather ever see his grandchildren again before he dies of cancer? How will my daughter cope as she starts prematurely as a doctor in the NHS in a week's time... made worse by having missed out on four months in Africa? Is my son taking social distancing seriously enough given that he has asthma and apparently a new girlfriend in London?

Let us stay positive and link in the hearts and minds of family and brilliant people everywhere to create what certainty we can. Of course, the irony of being locked in is that for years globalization has encouraged the reverse. Now we cannot connect physically, it is technology and social media that allows us to connect and become masters of our own destiny once again. Never having been particularly tech savvy my skills have improved exponentially in the last week or so... Zoom is now a favourite, the trusted Whatsapp is working hard and children are now at home to teach me more.

The outcome for us all will almost certainly be new ways of working... more innovation... perhaps more much-needed productivity, whilst also doing the basics better.

So, what is needed to use this new found personal, family, team and brand freedom we have? Perhaps the opportunity is to learn and change more than ever before. Even the doomsters of VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) could emerge as advocates of the new VUCA (Vision, Understanding, Connectivity and Agility).

### **Conscious and Clear Purpose**

Before we put our minds to the 'How?' and 'What?' of that freedom, we must be absolutely clear and conscious about our own, and the collective, 'Why?'. Maybe our personal purpose is to stay afloat financially, or to learn more than ever before, or to adapt faster than our competitors to the post-pandemic environment. Or is it simply to rediscover an old hobby, create a new one, or maintain the wellbeing of self, immediate family, friends and community in the short term?

All will drive different behaviours, and there is no doubt that whatever certainty or well-being any one of these creates, the energy is clear- #ItStartsWithMe. For those of us that can, we must first be clear of our personal purpose, perhaps even every day, before we rely on others. The spiritual, mental, physical and emotional value of this conscious clarity is well known. For many, home working will be a pleasure, a relief, and a chance to thrive. In writing this, my own mind has cleared to gain the conscious clarity of purpose needed at this stage.

### **Are you clear about your purpose through this unprecedented period of uncertainty?**

My purpose is to hold myself to account as a conscious and compassionate leader of self and family and for opportunities that emerge within the community. This allows me to live by my values of 'purpose' and 'progress' and translates into realistic priorities. I am going to change the balance of responsibility at home (do more!), prepare for the worst, stay connected to colleagues and clients, dust off the piano, have the best garden (that nobody is going to see this summer), get then keep fit and be ever available to support the wider community.

The 'How?' and 'What?' of that freedom is often impacted by unhelpful but necessary constraints; in many cases maybe over-energetic children at home, anxiety around the personal and financial impact of the virus, key worker requirements, social distancing and self-isolation, wifi inconsistencies from home, potential rationing, or just a lack of space. To keep sane through this the rigour and rhythms of personal and family life will need to become much more conscious.

### **Personal Discipline**

As a soldier, the simple discipline of a proper shave every morning was not there for us to look smart, but to embolden the soul at the start of what might be a difficult day. New personal routines and significant personal discipline are now required. Sadly, many see routine and discipline as an unnecessary constraint. Discipline actually serves as an enabler of freedom to keep us on track and so fulfil what we set out to achieve.

### **Leadership Now?**

Like discipline, leadership is a word often misunderstood, and a 'big chunk' term that means different things to different people and organisations. Right now, leading through Covid-19 is perhaps about self-awareness, clear purpose, data analysis, constant decision making, personal discipline, clarity of communication, and the conscious and compassionate role modelling of 'trust in the now' and 'hope for the future.' Planning for all eventualities, including if someone gets very ill, might also be tough but necessary areas of focus.

Trusting who and what is around you is more important than ever. I have decided to no longer argue over the colour of the new kitchen with my gloriously determined wife, but rather focus on what is important – checking on how people feel, listening hard to concerns (from at least two metres distance), and volunteering to help deliver food locally. Overall though as leaders let us all help others define what is certain every day, whilst enthusing about what can be learnt and changed for the better over time.

### **A Chance to Learn**

To change any culture at home or at work we need to learn. To learn we need to apply purpose, discipline and leadership to make it important and acceptable for those around us. We need to learn both about what is going on and how best to respond within the physical and online communities we are now locked into. Put simply, we need to get better at learning, and then innovating, in order to survive, thrive and fulfil our short, and longer-term ambitions. When my two daughters arrive home this week there will be a 'forming' and no doubt a 'storming' to get to the new 'normal' way of living at home amidst this virus. We will need to learn fast.

Keeping your CV up to date is always useful, but now is perhaps the time to review and record all the personal and collective learning of this CV (Corona Virus), for use now and at a later date. A daily check-in with yourself and those around you can do no harm, and I am then spending fifteen minutes daily writing down the events, feelings, thoughts, behaviours and processes of the day to ensure we do not lose the essence of this great opportunity to learn from my children, colleagues and friends. For when this is over, how do we avoid reverting back to the old ways and behaviours, both as individuals and as organisations? We must try not to forget the true value of the wartime spirit that may emerge once more.

## Planet

As well as addressing the current pandemic we could perhaps use the lessons of learning to work out how to save the planet, and so humanity. Lockdown in China reduced their carbon emissions by 25% and a study by Carbon Brief believes that this has only had a small reduction in economic output. In not using my car, my diesel emissions and fuel bill have dropped enormously, and lo and behold the sun is shining once more.

## Conclusion

So, there is a lot that can be done to replace the buying of loo paper! These next few months are about stacking the odds in our favour, whilst grabbing the opportunity to create more balance between collective wellbeing, economic progress and respect for the environment. Otherwise the four horsemen of the apocalypse will keep on coming.

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## Managing emotions

### Roger Porthouse

*Kendall, Cumbria, United Kingdom*

Emotions have a habit of running riot when you let them. They can be all-consuming, preventing rational thought and action. This is because your emotional brain operates independently from your rational brain and when it gets aroused (upset), it hogs all the resources that your rational brain needs to function correctly. It can quickly overwhelm you if you don't take action to control it.

In this chapter, we're going to briefly explore some strategies for managing your emotions, to help you be more robust and resilient in spite of the challenges you face.

### Labelling

As the saying on the popular TV show, *Catchphrase*, suggests, 'Say what you see!'

Tune in to your emotions and then name them when they occur. This is called 'Labelling' and it's a simple technique to identify an emotion you are feeling in the moment to allow your rational mind to start to think more clearly about the action you need to take. It helps redirect resources back to your rational mind so you can consider steps to deal with the challenge at hand and reduce the feeling of being overwhelmed.

### Accepting

We often spend vast amounts of nervous energy worrying and fretting about things over which we have no control. Accepting is a process of recognising what we can influence and control, and what we cannot. For those things which we cannot control, we overtly give ourselves permission not to worry about them. After all, you can't change them, accept that fact, and focus your energy on what you can influence and control.

Try it now: What is currently outside of your control? Tell yourself, 'I can't control that or influence it in any way, therefore I'm not going to waste my time and energy worrying about it'.

You can then reinforce this by using Positive Reframing or Being Grateful (both below) to focus on more positive things. If you catch yourself worrying about it again, just repeat the exercise above.

### **Box Breathing**

This is particularly useful if you are feeling a panic attack coming on or are simply feeling overwhelmed. Sit down, ideally in an upright position, and breathe in through your nose for five seconds. At the top of your breath, hold it for five seconds before exhaling again through the mouth, slowly controlling the release of air over five more seconds. Before breathing in again, count off a final five seconds then repeat the cycle. This can help you feel calmer as you lower your blood pressure, reduce your heart rate and get much needed oxygen to the brain.

### **Positive Reframing**

Positive reframing is a process where you look for the positives or good in the current situation. Self-isolation in a pandemic, for example, might give you an opportunity to catch up on some reading or do some learning. It is taking a 'glass half-full' view of the world. It is not denying the stressful situation, but it is seeking to extract some good from it.

### **Being Grateful**

In a similar vein, being grateful is a useful self-tonic in times of suffering and stress. Look at all aspects of your life and ask yourself, what is it that you can be grateful for in this particular instant? It might be that you are grateful for the unconditional love of your dog, or that the sun is shining or that you are fortunate enough to have a roof over your head. Try and find three things a day for which you are grateful as a little personal pick-me-up.

### **Talk to Someone**

In times of stress, it's important to find someone with whom you can share your thoughts and feelings. Who can you call – even if it's just for a chat? Maybe you can't talk to someone, in which case, try writing to yourself as if you were writing to your best friend. Use Labelling, Acceptance, Positive Reframing and Being Grateful as prompts in your letter to yourself.

### **Be Kind**

Finally, be kind to yourself. If someone came to you feeling anxious and fragile, you would want to support them and help them get to a better place. You need to take the same attitude with yourself as you accept how you feel and take a positive and affirming action to get to a better place.

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## Supporting each other and ourselves in these difficult times

Ann Akers

*Hampshire, United Kingdom*

When you are worried and distressed, it's important to look after yourself first. Be kind to yourself, show yourself compassion and allow yourself time to do this. And breathe. Deeply! It's a bit like when the airlines ask you to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others. We all need to be the most positive version of ourselves and in the best state of mind that we can be, before we can help others.

Exploring what we often call the change curve and the reaction needed through leadership (leadership in the broadest sense of supporting others in every way) might be a useful starting point for us. Many people have heard of this and use it to discuss change and just as many don't realise its origins and how to work with it at a deeper level.

The Kubler Ross change curve (developed by a Swiss psychiatrist of that name) originates from a need to help people suffering grief, loss and serious illness. It is a path that most of us go through when we suffer in this way. We typically experience shock and denial, followed by anger. We then move to bargaining and this might lead to frustration and in the worst cases depression. Hopefully, we can move on to acceptance and dealing with the situation we find ourselves in.

Why is this helpful? Well in business it is often used to help people with big life events such as redundancy or a change of role that was unexpected and/or unwanted. We need to be aware that people are often deeply disturbed by things which would not bother us at all – but it is very real for them. It affects their performance and wellbeing and leaves people feeling totally stuck. I have experienced people who exhibit these characteristics after an office move when they don't get their usual window seat! Those of you who have ever had to produce a new office plan will recognise this! If you've ever been made redundant then an office move story might seem trivial – but both example situations can result in the feelings outlined in this model.

In this difficult and arguably unprecedented time of coronavirus, I think we can all relate to the origins of this change curve. Confusion, grief and sadness, and, for some, complete panic. Everyone I have spoken to is keen to get some sense of what to do and how to help others.

**Let's look at these stages in a bit more detail – we will all be experiencing them:**

- Denial: Confusion, shock, fear and even avoidance
- Anger: Displaying frustration, irritation and anxiety

What do you need during this stage? What do people you want to support need during this stage? Everyone needs clarity, information, facts, thoughts and ideas delivered in a straightforward, easy to understand way.

- Bargaining and frustration: Struggling to find meaning, reaching out to others and the importance of being able to tell one's own stories.

What do we and those we support need at this stage? Humans need to be listened to, we need emotional support and to be cared for and for people to be kind to us and give us time.



- Depression: A feeling of hopelessness, of being overwhelmed: maybe even triggering the fight, flight and freeze response.

There are times when people might need professional support if this becomes clinical depression. However, we can help by giving people even more time as with the previous stage. Listening, talking and giving our time. Often people just need to know someone cares and is willing to listen. Listen deeply without judgement or comparing with themselves.

- Acceptance: Exploring options, looking at new ways to deal with this situation and seeking positive moments and acceptable solutions.

What do we and others need at this stage? Guidance, direction, the opportunity to explore, be creative, try to find ways to deal with the situation, and maybe even try to find some positives from the situation you or they find themselves in.

This model might help us to understand what we are going through, what we need from others and what we might need at the different stages as we struggle with this situation of extreme change that we find ourselves in.

Understanding and being able to label the feelings can help us to realise that these are 'normal' reactions and maybe help us to understand how to deal with our emotions and those of others.

The overall message I want to leave you with is:

- Accept that you are likely to travel through this change curve
  - You might get stuck for a while at a certain stage
  - You might go backwards and travel through a stage once or twice
  - Your timing will be different and more or less extreme than others you are trying to support
  - Look after yourself first
  - Only then can you be the best support possible for those that need this from you
- Good luck and let's hope that 'this too will pass'.

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## Help yourself heal

Sophia Scokalo

*A teenager living in Switzerland*

Remember when we were young, we would get sent to our rooms when we got into trouble? When we got older, we came to enjoy the personal space, and our parents might have struggled to get us out of our rooms. Now, we are all sitting at home, because Mother Earth decided to give us a time out.

Now just turned twenty, and normally this is the time that I would be out and about experiencing life and all it has to offer. Yet here I sit, in the same house I grew up in, quarantined. I have no excuses to avoid my growing to-do list, and no way of escaping my thoughts. It feels vaguely familiar.

I spent most of my conscious life quarantined in my own head... Never letting anything in, or out. I was scared that maybe I was the virus, and if I let anything slip it would mean infecting

and ultimately hurting others. I was a disease, a thing capable of mass destruction that targeted the people I loved the most. A little dramatic, but how I felt nevertheless.

I think back to the years I spent like that, it felt like a prison sentence. Like I was being punished for a crime I didn't commit, or didn't understand. It felt cold and dark, and I felt helpless. It took me a very long time to realise that I was the one punishing myself and making myself pay for the harm others inflicted. All because I was too scared to hold others accountable for their actions. The mind can be both the thing that keeps you landlocked or the key to soaring into freedom.

From the age of twelve, I had to come to terms with the fact that I, unlike most other twelve-year-olds, had a different set of priorities. I had my education and I had my health. My mental health, more specifically. At first, that meant obligatory therapy. Now, I'll let you in on a secret... I was a very stubborn little sh\*t at that age. I didn't see the point in working with a therapist because, according to me, there was nothing wrong. Honestly, it makes me laugh a little looking back, the psychiatrist was impossibly patient with me. From there, it became blatantly obvious to the outside world (and slowly to me too) that I was very unwell. A lot of sexual violence, bullying, and chaos at home meant I was putting my emotions in a cage, and when they boiled over, I reacted poorly. Usually in anger and self-loathing. I lashed out at the world, thinking it would somehow remove and rectify the gaping wound that I had been left with. But what's done is done, and how you react to the harsh reality defines how successful you are at overcoming it.

It takes perseverance and patience, two virtues we are now strong-armed into learning. That being said, this time is hard for all of us. It's scary to be on lockdown and have a worldwide pandemic. Aside from the fear, it can feel lonely. But this is also a time where we come together. Not physically (please stay home unless you need milk or something), but we all have a part to play in fighting COVID-19. We are all working together to keep the vulnerable safe, by staying home and creating a new normal until this passes. After every winter, there is always spring.

It took me a long time to accept my past, and love the iterations of myself I locked away for so long. It took equally as long to rebuild myself and my frame of mind. Now that we are all at home, instead of tackling the to-do list or contemplating texting your ex, take a moment to reflect. Help yourself heal, without the hindrance of what your life is usually like.

It's like updating to the latest iOS, it's annoying, and you put it off for as long as you can. But, when you finally decide to update and wait the painful hour, everything runs a little smoother. The screen is a little clearer, and the colours are a little brighter. There will always be glitches, some of them funny, some annoying, and some that drive you crazy.

But every update is a step forward in the right direction.

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## Mind–body connection to overcome this challenging time

Tim Exeter

*Worked with elite sportspeople Zaheer Khan, Yuvraj Singh, Steve Thompson, Ben Cohen, Matt Dawson, Brendon Hartley and Carlos Takam. From Leamington Spa, Warwickshire.*

Everyone is talking about how this situation will change how business works and a new way of working will emerge. I hope likewise that people think about their personal health, not just that of the business they own or work for. Healthy people are more productive.

I trust you will find this information useful. Despite my background in elite sport, this is not about being super fit, this applies to everyone; it is completely scalable from a top athlete to a normal person. (You do not have to try some of the ridiculous stuff posted out there by so-called gurus). If we must stay at home for an extended period:

- Get your mindset right and accept it and adapt
- Focus and communicate positively not negatively
- Control what you can and leave the big stuff to the experts
- Don't waste energy and stress on things you can't affect

“I have always believed exercise is a key to physical health and peace of mind” –

Nelson Mandela

(who was imprisoned for 27 years without home-shopping delivery, TV, etc)

His daily routine in his cell included 45 minutes of shadow boxing and running on the spot plus 100 press-ups and 200 sit-ups (he continued after his release).

### Mindset is key

See this situation as an opportunity to:

- Reset your lifestyle
- Sleep better
- Be physical active – move more
- Eat less and healthier
- Learn to relax
- Set some goals

### Daily Structure

- If you are working from home, keep to office hours (work–life balance).
- No commute means more free time. Make sure you use it wisely – exercise, relaxation, CPD, kids time, even a little more sleep.

- Move regularly – we are designed to move not sit. Our body adapts, which is why many people already have spinal issues due to deskbound time. Slouching over can also crush our organs which need the natural massage from movement.
- Our brain needs a break from screens and desks. Change positions, move around while using the phone.

## Sleep

We don't get enough quality sleep; deprivation is a real problem. Sleep better and:

- Boost natural immunity
- Kill bad cells
- Eliminate toxins
- The body repairs while you sleep
- Improve fat loss

## Physical Activity

- Move well and often for 5 minutes regularly throughout the day.
- Let off steam, pump blood and oxygen around the body, sweat a little, think clearer.
- Who says you need to work out for 30, 60, or 90 minutes? (unless you are training for an event).
- Break it down into five-minutes, multiple times a day. I would like to see the workplace environment change. We are becoming like the robots that may replace us, sitting more than ever.
- Get up and move, it doesn't always have to be a full-on gym session!
- Walk a little, use the stairs.
- Stretch.
- Do some simple mobility moves for your hips to relieve the spine especially the lower back.
- Planks are for planks. Use 3D movements where possible rather than static exercises. Imaginary discus throws are a great idea or try some simple tai chi.
- Make circles to mobilise your joints – wrists, elbows, shoulders, hips, and ankles.
- Put some tunes on and dance.

Here are some basic guidelines (basic is OK!)

- Pulse-raisers
  - Skip
  - Jump
  - Run in place
  - If you have room try lying on the floor then standing up, and doing that ten times (watch how you're breathing afterwards). Add in things like starting on the front, back, left and right sides.

- Press-ups (the most underrated exercise) loads of variations and progressions possible, works arms, shoulders, trunk/core, glutes and legs
- Pulls
  - Use a door frame, bannister, for the upper back, shoulders, forearms
- Lower body options
  - Squat, single-leg squat, lunges (forwards and lateral), Cossack squat, step-ups on the stairs or chair, calf raises, hip thrusts for the glutes and back.
  - Be imaginative, use furniture, the kids, etc. Your own body weight is fine; use different tempos, positions, sets and reps.

### **Nutrition**

- Stay hydrated
- Reduce alcohol consumption
- Intermittent fasting – the benefits include eliminating toxins and building immune-system strength. This is also not as hard as many people think, eat before 8 pm and then avoid eating until 12 pm the next day. That way you are asleep for a large chunk of the time.

### **Relaxation**

Read, listen to music, or try some simple breathing exercises if you have healthy lungs.

### **Breathing**

Try different methods and find what works for you to relax and feed the brain and help posture.

- Sit or lie on the floor, let the belly fill with each inhale.
- Inhale for 4 seconds/exhale for 4 seconds. Try to do this for 2 minutes to begin with and gradually increase to 5 minutes.
- Inhale for 7 seconds/ exhale for 11 seconds. If you struggle with this duration then just make sure the exhale lasts longer than the inhale.

### **Main message**

- Move often, vary what you do, feed the brain oxygen, move your muscles, overload them regularly to maintain or develop strength.
- We were all kids once; we can learn from that. Remember how we ran around and played rather than sitting still.
- We all fight the onset of technology and how it has changed our lives and the lives of our children. This change is not always for the best so use this as an opportunity to engage in movement with the people that we love.

Set some goals such as:

- To be able to do a set number of an exercise
- Build to 10 mins a day of breathing exercises

- Complete a set number of 5-minute breaks
- Eat a little less (try intermittent fasting)
- 

Good luck, keep healthy, use this opportunity to make a positive change and take these changes forward beyond this crisis.

## The perfect imbalance

**Jeff Weigh**

*Chester, United Kingdom*

Prior to finding ourselves on lockdown and in these unprecedented times, 40% of people were already feeling isolated at work (Harvard Business Review).

The pressure of work and fitting everything in has been increasing for some time.

In recent years the spotlight has been focusing on areas such as employee engagement, wellbeing and mental health.

Balance for you may already have shifted towards an imbalance.

Yes, these are testing times.

Yes, these are stressful times.

You may be sitting at home right now thinking that this is set to be amplified in the coming weeks and months, but that doesn't have to be the case.

One area of our lives that we can positively influence and actively take control of in the coming weeks is our balance.

Put the old model of work-life balance to one side for now.

The one where you've been trying to balance up work with the other areas of your life.

This has been broken for some time. Things aren't equal anymore and as you read this:

- You may be working from home, trying to social distance to keep you and your family safe.
- You may be looking after your children as well, trying to homeschool and entertain them alongside work.
- You may be managing other people at work (who also face the challenges above) and that brings the additional responsibility of leading and guiding others through these uncertain times.

When uncertainty exists, it's important to look towards those people and areas in our lives that give us certainty.

Right now, we all need to be able to find something that gives us balance in our lives.

A balance that prevents us from feeling isolated. A balance that can empower ourselves and those around us.

People assume we have to have balance all of the time. We don't and it's impossible.

Avoid at all costs: becoming a bad juggler!

Things get dropped and it saps your energy.

Balance is personal: what it looks like will vary from person to person.

The Scandinavian's have a term called *hygge* which comes from a Norwegian word for well-being. It's a concept used to describe a moment or feeling that is cosy, special or charming: a moment of balance.

The Swedish have a word called *lagom* which translates as 'not too much, not too little – just right': another moment of balance.

The Chinese have a word called *chi* which translates to aliveness, life force energy or life breath: a moment of balance.

Start by asking yourself; what do I need today or right now? It might be:

- Reading a book
- Meditating
- Exercising
- Being outside
- Gardening
- Watching a movie.
- Making a cup of tea or coffee
- Baking
- Cleaning
- Drawing / Painting
- Video calling friends and family
- Walking
- Sitting and doing nothing
- Tidying
- Writing
- Listening to a podcast or audiobook
- Having a bath
- Watching the sun rise or set
- Playing with your children
- Playing with your pets
- Sleeping (napping)
- Taking pictures

Be mindful of busyness – the need to be doing things all of the time without care or consideration for your balance.

“He who chases two rabbits catches neither.”

– Confucius

Involve and include your family in conversations around balance and how each of us can build these into our day.

None of us should feel isolated during these uncertain times and knowing what gives us balance, gives us hope.

Set yourself the challenge of doing one activity each day.

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## Why should we ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’?

**Stewart Hill**

*Former British Army officer, now a professional speaker, Derby, United Kingdom*

It is clear that COVID-19 has created a lot of instability and threats around the world. We are threatened on many levels: businesses, organisations, schools, individuals, our social environment.

These will be very difficult times for a lot of people; stress levels and anxiety will rise.

I was a successful British Army officer for 18 years until I was injured in Afghanistan in 2010. I suffered a severe traumatic brain injury and my abilities changed. I lost my job, my career, my income, my identity, my brain. My life was threatened, my livelihood was threatened, my family life was threatened and I was left with brain impairments preventing me from ever being able to match the level of work I had before. So, I've had to readjust and reframe my life - and reframe my brain - because of the injury. I've had to learn to deal with threatening situations and a huge amount of stress and anxiety in my work and life, particularly since my injury ten years ago.

To deal with these new demands placed upon us by the coronavirus we need to be able to think clearly. You can only think clearly if you free up the emotional part of the brain.

Simplistically, the brain deals with information through three levels. The survival level, the emotional level and the thinking level of the brain. These levels combine tasks so the relationship and balance between the three is critical to how we think, feel and behave.

If we get into a situation where we are always thinking about the negative impact of the virus then we will spend a long time in survival mode, which will increase our cortisol levels, increase our stress, impact on our health and decrease our ability to function.

If we reduce the threat or perceived threat, information then enters the emotional level, located in the middle part of the brain called the limbic system. Here all decisions are based on your emotions. Finally, the information arrives in the thinking part of the brain, the frontal lobes, where you can analyse, plan, organise your resources, determine possible consequences and options, and then make an informed decision.

If you can calm down the emotional part of the brain you will send signals that there isn't a threat to your survival, which will lower your heart rate, reduce your blood pressure, and calm your emotions down. This frees up blood and oxygen and allows the information to travel to the thinking level of the brain. This allows you to make a decision based on your knowledge, experience, capability and intellect rather than just on your emotion.

We can control our emotional brain through targeting the limbic system from the bottom-up and top-down, to calm our emotions.

### **Bottom-Up**

You can control your reaction through the survival level of the brain, the physiological part responsible for such things as breathing, sleeping, heart rate and blood pressure. The way to influence the survival brain is primarily through breathing exercises. Controlling and slowing



your breathing tells the brain that the threat or perceived threat has gone; this is why breathing techniques are so important when you want to calm down the emotional part of the brain.

### **Top-Down**

Managing your reaction through the thinking level of the brain. This can be achieved through focused thinking, creative activities, self-awareness (of your thoughts, feelings and behaviour), mindfulness, and positive thoughts and actions.

I am not stipulating that if you follow this advice all will be OK with your business, your work and/or your family life. We are all under pressure and we need to be able to free up space in our brains to give us energy to keep moving forward. I have had to control my mind over the last decade to free up energy to improve my physical and mental health and allow me to keep pushing forward.

When you calm down you will have more energy to help deal with the demands being placed upon us by COVID-19.

When you calm down you can think to the best of your ability, helping you get through this, which is what we need to do as leaders in these very turbulent times.

We need strong, cognitive, thinking-level leadership in government, in business, in society, in families, and particularly in ourselves. When we keep calm, we can carry on.

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## **Taking control of a bad situation**

**Mark Latteman**

*London, United Kingdom*

I was looking at a picture in a magazine this week, underneath the caption “Inner Voices”. It was of a man dressed in a suit. Sitting on his right shoulder was a tiny figure with a radiant smile. This figure was whispering lots of positive, supportive statements to the man, such as: “You are great, you’ve got this, you can overcome anything”. On the man’s left shoulder, a scowling, angry figure was taking great delight in telling him: “You are useless, you can’t cope, give up now!!”

I realised that this could easily have been a picture of me in the suit, particularly at this time of huge uncertainty and change. If I look at things rationally, I know – as I’m sure you do - that we live in a volatile and uncertain world, with so much that is outside of our direct (and indirect) control. But when I look back over my life so far, it is only at times of fundamental change that I realise how powerful these “inner voices” can be.

I run sessions on ‘Leading Through Change’ for a variety of clients all over the world, and coach lots of people who are looking to navigate through challenging periods in their professional life. But let me give you a sample of the internal dialogue which has often occupied my thoughts, particularly over the last few weeks: “Why am I so concerned about this change and uncertainty? What is wrong with me? I teach people this stuff for goodness sake!! Does that mean I’m inauthentic as a facilitator or coach? What a fake!!”

In short, the scowling, negative figure on my shoulder was shouting louder than the smiling, positive one.

Because these 'voices' are not new to me, I've developed a couple of ways of trying to 'turn the volume up' on the positive voice.

I've thought about the things that are truly important to me and I've written them down. I found it helps to think about the times when I was most happy/fulfilled/proud/content. What was I doing? Who was I with? What was it about that situation that made me feel that way? This then helps me to compile a list of the things (some people call them 'values') that are essential for me to be able to live a fulfilled and happy life. And I've found that this list can help when I've got key decisions to make.

I've considered the things I can control and the things that I can't. I can't control how long this current period of lockdown will be, but I can control what I do with my time. This period of self-isolation has enabled me to read more books, finish some of those time-consuming DIY jobs and learn some new skills (e.g. becoming slightly more adept at video conferencing). And one day I might get around to finishing that novel!! But not having to worry about missing my train, or negotiating traffic on the M25, has been strangely liberating.

I've also started to look at mindfulness. There is loads of stuff on the internet about this and I've found some of the tools and techniques helpful, particularly in helping me to keep positive.

We are all different, and we react to periods of uncertainty and ambiguity in different ways. Some of us will breeze through this period. Others will find it hugely challenging and stressful for a variety of reasons. There is no one 'right' way to cope with change and uncertainty, but the human spirit is amazingly resilient. Do all you can to turn up the volume on the positive, supportive figure on your shoulder.

# PART 5

## Community

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### Social networks from CV19

Simon Haben

*Norfolk, UK*

The words below are my personal perspectives and not the views of any organisation I may be seen to represent. They were also written without any verified data and therefore contain potentially inaccurate assumptions.

Alongside the uncertainty created by CV-19, a more long-lasting and potentially deeper issue is occurring. The changing way our social networks are formed, used and closed.

Work provides purpose. It also provides, for many, a sense of community and social interaction. Even those people who would claim to be introverts, they often need some sort of contact with people that they know they can get with a degree of regularity. For those who are extroverts, the social need is obviously much higher.

If you are not in work then you will most probably have various social groups you belong to. For the vast majority of people not in work, i.e. the retired population, these social groups provide the post-work purpose they need as well as a level of social contact. The retired are fortunate in that they can choose the sort of purpose and social contact they want - it therefore typically means more to them one might suggest.

The early days of CV-19 were treated with interest and concern. News reports highlighted the way in which China dealt with it and how they took what some considered to be far-reaching steps to deal with the problem. The building of a hospital in ten days was astonishing, the lockdown of key cities never seen before in such a way. In other parts of the world, people look on amazed but also with a sense of detachment. The problem was over there and not over here. The development of the virus in Italy brought things much closer to home and as life started to be constrained with Government announcements such as asking people to work from home, reduce social contact, closing pubs and schools, the enormity of the situation hit people. Concern and worry set in. The uncertainty was driving both anxiety and fear. People's social networks were stopping. What would they do?

Take the story of a woman in her forties who had worked for the same organisation for a number of years, in the same building, in pretty much the same team. She was an early isolator and for her working from home was possible. It had its benefits, the dog at her feet, the absence of a commute and some more flexibility. However, the habits she had of conversing with her team, seeing the facial reactions close to her and the impromptu banter was missing. Her social networks were changing. Change is always difficult no matter how it is done. Having changes forced on you quickly is hard, even though the reason is obvious and clear.

A grandfather lives close to his offspring, his grown-up children have children of their own who rely on the grandparent for some child-care responsibilities. This is very common and provides enjoyment and social benefit to all three generations. Suddenly pulling this away because of the health risks can be seen as traumatic. The younger generations want to care for the older ones. The older ones might be less worried about their own health and want to continue to help their families. It can be hard for them to understand why things really need to change. They don't want to burden the NHS and this altruistic view may be what finally creates a different behaviour. But it is not easy and the grandfather misses his grandchildren. A key part of his social network has physically gone, almost overnight.

An elderly woman lives on her own; both her children lead their own lives and stay in regular contact but she relies on other social groups to supplement her social needs and keep her fit and active. Over the course of a few days, these social networks stop. The threat of the virus is too much and she hibernates at the start of the spring. She worries about the physical health of others and about her own emotional and mental health. There is little uncertainty in her mind that this will be a difficult time. It might make it easier if it had a clear end, but the path for the next few months is unknown and unwelcome.

The technology worker in his thirties has two children and is time-poor. The opportunity to do far more work from home seems very attractive. There is the shed to organise, the spare room to paint and the vegetables in the garden to plant. He is strongly advocating social distancing at work to promote the move to home working but ironically is quite happy to stand in line in the supermarket to ensure he buys enough for what might come next, to queue in the DIY shop for paint and to enjoy one last session with the lads on the Friday night before the pub shuts for an indefinite period. The reality of the kids being at home all day and in need of some attention, the increased work demands and knowledge that he can't get his own time when he needs it becomes clear. He has to work out how to balance these new and different social environments and make some sense of it.

The classic theory of change talks about loss and the way people adapt. In the case of CV-19, it is relatively sudden and multifaceted. Life is changing considerably and people don't have control. Acceptance to the new world will come, but how do we speed it up and see the benefits of working differently. There are many questions and many solutions. Finding the right ones that personally fit will be a challenge we all have.

There are key things to consider...

What is the new sense of purpose to people's lives? Many will not have thought about this for some time and will find the very activity of it hard. Purpose can also be seen as grandiose, something for those who have socially or financially important roles, when the reality is simple - how will people fill their time and how will they socially connect? So, what is your purpose to yourself, your family, your neighbour, your friends? What are you doing for them?

How are old social networks continued but in a different way? What will people have to learn in order to do this? The ability to use technology is easy for some and difficult for others. No longer can people post on social media the things they have done outside of the home, they have to look at what they have done inside the home. The foundations are the social networks that exist already, the questions are: how will the fabric of them adjust? Who will take a lead to change the format from physical presence to online/ telephone meetings? Where one person leads, others will follow, even in social groups that are not adjusted to this way of being.

Being able to have humour about the situation eases tension and worry. A laugh a day will keep the doctor away. It is interesting to hear radio stations asking for listeners to ring in with jokes, to see the early home workers having fun with a hand puppet or the gags online about focusing on work whilst the kids trash the house in the background.

We are all creatures of some sort of habit. These are being washed away by a tsunami of temporary and maybe permanent change. Those that recover best will create some new habits, never minding if they will be temporary or permanent, just doing it. Those new habits might consist of doing some sort of exercise in the morning instead of the daily commute, of cooking with raw ingredients from local shops rather than the ready meals from a supermarket or extending the working day to much later but taking chunks of time out of the day to give the kids some attention.

What we all choose to do is up to us. Some people are inevitably more positive than others. For those who are able, it is time to take on some different responsibilities and act with consideration for others.

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## Looking after our elders

V. Abson

*Birmingham, United Kingdom*

I run a small business and have been listening avidly to the news about coronavirus over recent weeks. My initial thoughts were: *What would this mean for me and my clients? How can I support them? How can I transition my work to an online service?* Then I had another thought: *How can I also support my mother who has complex health needs during this time?*

My mother is 88, has diabetes, shows early signs of memory impairment, and is recovering from a leg injury. She lives in a retirement village about 10 miles away from me and I am her main carer. I go up every few days to help her, do her shopping, etc. I also have people who spend time with her, clean, and help her in other ways. Last week, I thought she could self-isolate in the retirement village. I was then told that the cleaner and support network I had created for her would no longer be allowed to visit. She would have no stimulation or social engagement apart from my visits, as her main carer.

She could have a meal delivered to her doorstep, but no external visits. For her, this was a huge loss. Over Mothering Sunday weekend she saw friends leaving the retirement village to live with their families. She was asking to leave and come to live with me as she felt she couldn't cope with the isolation. The trigger was her seeing other people being taken home to their families and the people she usually sees being cut off from her. I saw increasing panic and, on Monday when she phoned, she had a high level of anxiety. She was almost hysterical, felt trapped, and wanted to escape. There was a dawning realisation of the pressure this would put on me, and that it wasn't practical to leave her on her own.

With the announcement of the nation's lockdown, I realised that I had to go and collect her for her own sanity and wellbeing. This meant significant change for me – she was going to be with me full-time for the next three months. I would be with her 24/7 and I hadn't made any

adjustments. I had already been having difficulties as the shops grew increasingly empty, and there was a growing pressure of not being able to sustain her living independently, so she was very reliant upon me. This has obviously impacted on my work and my life as I live in a two bedroom flat and there are many logistical and practical challenges.

Our wider family unit live in other parts of the UK and Switzerland so helping my mother has rested mainly on me. When I collected her on Monday she was so distressed that she almost had an angina attack. She slept for the next two days which I think was her body's way of dealing with post traumatic recovery. I am now looking after my mother in my home for the next three months while trying to manage my business online.

Part of my response was putting my mother's needs first and providing a sense of safety and security for her in my home. I am trying to encourage a level of independence by establishing her own space and providing structured activities so she is less reliant on me through the day. What can we do together and what can she do for herself? There are psychological and physical challenges in keeping healthy and in redefining our relationship and boundaries. My mother needs attention and patience, and I am supporting her personal care, mental wellbeing, and emotional care at the same time as running a business.

I have health challenges myself and received the NHS "high risk" letter this morning, which I wasn't expecting. This has again shifted my response to coronavirus, as I need to think how I can also manage my own health and mental wellbeing during this time. I have to reach out and connect with other people, share that sense of confinement, and find humour where I can, keep active, keep busy, and mentally alert. In some ways, self-isolating alone would have been an ideal opportunity to do all the stuff I haven't been able to do for ages. I even looked forward to working from home and using the extra time to catch up on my admin and do the spring cleaning.

I have been noticing how quickly my world has altered – on a weekly, daily, even hourly basis – and how quickly I have to adapt and change. I am connecting with people, finding new ways to maintain relationships, and doing things differently – such as online singing to music with my choir, Zoom calls with professional groups and learning new ways to connect both professionally and personally. I am not a big user of social media but am now using technology to reconnect with friends I haven't spoken to for a long time.

I have become more present-focused, reaching out to others for help and support. I am noticing my own vulnerability and loss of control over the situation, my reflections and my curiosity about what is important, what I can do and how I can help others. I am keeping positive and focused and trying to respond well to the changes around me.

When this first happened, my focus was my clients and what I could do to help them, but now I am realising that I am having to put my own oxygen mask on first, then my mother's, then I can re-engage with what is important in my business and work. Priorities have been re-ordered; I have changed my goals and am changing my life and work situation given the new reality.

Three weeks ago I was a professional businesswoman, engaging freely in the world around me. Suddenly it has all changed. It is about me, my mum, and our wider family, all living and working in a different situation and experiencing a 'new normal' life.

When you hear about someone in your network who has coronavirus it also brings home the risk. It makes you recognise it is an invisible killer and it is also a mental wellbeing challenge

for us all which will last for a while. The risks will continue for months, and it may be a year before we get a vaccine, and then there is also the risk that the virus will come around again. We don't know how the world will change so we all have to dig deep, make sacrifices, and pull together.

My reflections about what will help? Develop our resilience, focus our energies, be mindful, think about the positives, develop strategies to adapt and live well through uncertainty, manage other people's expectations, and create new support systems around us. People on their own will have challenges of not being connected, so we should try and reach out to support them where we can. There are layers and layers of complexity involved in this situation, so I believe that knowing what is important and taking control of what we can is a good start. Being mindful, too, that there are people living in worse conditions, so let's stay positive, appreciate what we have and be kind to ourselves and others, and I believe we can get through this together.

I will continue to sing online, connect with professional groups and friends online, have lots of Facetime and Zoom calls, catch up on programmes, and self-care. There is a parallel here between coronavirus and climate change in the environment; the earth has become polluted and we need to take time out and think about how we can live differently. Every cloud has a silver lining, so maybe this is the time for us to slow down, connect and show we care, work as a community, and engage with people differently. Take time to listen deeply to others, to understand what is going on for them and to help them feel supported, but most importantly take time for ourselves to be better human beings.

We can develop the way we relate to each other, and through our sense of social responsibility and by our actions we show our humanity. I believe this crisis has lessons for us all and I hope that with time it will renew and replenish our lives, our country, and how we live together on this planet.

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## Community-building and mutual aid

Nick McAlpin

*Freelance journalist and student, Cambridgeshire, UK*

As a social scientist in training, it has become second nature for me to intently observe the minute changes in the comings and goings of everyday life. While this is occurring all the time, the novel coronavirus outbreak has marked a particularly severe and obvious moment of social reconfiguration. Aside from the general closure of pubs, restaurants and shops and the institution of social distancing measures, students have faced much anxiety and uncertainty over the status of their lectures, research and exams. Nevertheless, now that the UK is implementing far more restrictive lockdown measures, it is critical to find a message of hope to keep us going.

For me, and perhaps many students, this is a simple task. The combined effect of having to rely on others by necessity, given the challenges posed by the present pandemic, and the sense of empathy and solidarity generated by sharing in this experience has brought the student community together like never before. This is certainly true of those on my course. In mid-

March 2020, when it first became apparent that COVID-19 would pose a serious threat to the UK, a classmate returned home to Sweden to avoid being trapped here. The day before he left, he gave me all the food he had: rice, carrots, chickpeas and a mountain of pasta that he'd stocked up on a few weeks prior. At that point, my cupboards were bare and panic buyers had made it exceedingly difficult for me to find food. I was touched by his kindness. Soon after, a doctoral candidate headed home by aeroplane leaving the Gardening Society her avocado plants. Then, a student house down the road from us suddenly came down with a suspected case of the virus. Students jumped into action, sourcing paracetamol from all over town and doing their food shop for them. As their assigned volunteer helper, I was inundated with messages from fellow students asking how they could chip in and checking if everyone was alright.

This is what one might call mutual aid. Similarly to how I have [described it elsewhere](#), mutual aid is sustained voluntary assistance among equals for common gain. I'll do for you what I can to help you meet your needs, and you do the same for me and others in our community because we recognise that not one of us can do it on our own. This reinforces the fact that we are all in the same position now. And once someone does an act of kindness for you, you feel almost obligated to pass it on. This builds community since it creates a never-ending web of interdependence and feelings of warmth for one another.

For my Social Anthropology cohort, collaboratively writing a letter to our department seeking clarification on changes to our studies, venting to one another about fieldwork cancellations and, as mentioned, material support has seen us our friendship bonds renewed. On Saturday, 21 March, we organised a Skype e-drinking session, where some drank cider, others wine and others tea. A wonderful time was had by all - so much so that we've now decided to make this a weekly affair. I'm now in daily phone contact with members of the class I had never texted prior to this crisis. Many of us have remarked that the deepening of our friendships with others on the programme has been a silver lining amidst all the uncertainty and panic. This is something to hold onto and which I have found grounds me. Fortunately, I believe this isn't a possibility restricted solely to students. The rise of mutual aid groups in villages, towns and cities up and down the entirety of this country attests to that.

My advice is to focus on building community spirit by looking out for one another. Not only will this get us through the tough times ahead, but it'll serve us well as we come to fight existential crises in future, with climate change being foremost among them.

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## Opportunities in the time of COVID-19

**Cora Lynn Heimer Rathbone**

*Hertfordshire, UK*

In times of great uncertainty, what do we humans most strive to retain? What do we worship? It seems the answer is the "I"!

From 1964, the word "I" has vastly increased in frequency over the "we". Where does community and the greater good stand?



Historically, when societies go through adversity, “We” dominates. When affluence reigns, “I” ascends. In times of affluence, when “we” doesn’t return, civilisations disintegrate. (Think Ancient Greece and Rome.)

Our greatest opportunity, in this time of COVID-19, is to reset the needle – to think and talk more “we” than “I”. There is hope! When I see China sending PPE (personal protective equipment) and doctors to Italy to help doctors there combat the spread of COVID-19, I feel hope (the courage that things *can* get better) even if not optimism (the belief that things *will* get better) – because we can hope in the absence of certainty.

Perhaps our greatest opportunity, in this time of COVID-19, is to refocus ourselves and our businesses on what matters most – “we” and community.

But how do we, how do I, stay positive through this challenging time?

David Rock’s SCARF model says that as humans we seek to protect five things: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relationships and Fairness. Which is most important for you?

For me, even though certainty and relationships matter hugely, fairness is of paramount importance. Let me elaborate with a personal story.

In November 1960, my parents fled Cuba with my brother and me. My brother was due to be seven in January. Ostensibly to eliminate illiteracy, the Castro regime had legislated that children, from the age of seven, would board in state-run military academies. Parental contact would be minimal. My parents decided to get my brother and me out.

We had already lost the family coffee farm in the hills of Somanta and the coffee roasting plant in Guantanamo City – legacies of my mother’s entrepreneurial father, a penniless émigré from northern Spain. We’d received notice on our 18-bedroom family home – which housed four generations and staff.

My parents’ plan was to deposit my brother and me with family who had already left Cuba and begun to settle in Puerto Rico, return to Cuba to set their affairs in order, and rejoin us until such time as (they hoped) the Castro government toppled.

The day after we left Cuba, the US broke relations with the island-state. We couldn’t return.

With exile from Cuba came total material loss. I remember one Friday evening, about three months after we left Cuba. We’d just arrived in St Thomas VI where Pappa had been transferred to work for the US Federal Government. Pappa, my brother and I sat on the steps of our tiny two-bedroomed house, in the hot dust-bowl of the island. Pappa, speaking softly, said; “Let’s pray that the Father provides for us because we have run out of cash, have no food in the house and my first paycheck has not landed in our bank.” We prayed the “Our Father” loudly and said “Amen”. When we opened our eyes, we saw a five-dollar-bill floating down slowly to land at Pappa’s feet. “Let’s go quickly before the shops close!” cried Pappa as he pocketed the bill. Holding hands, we marched to the nearest open market. The next day Pappa’s salary hit the bank.

With exile from Cuba also came isolation from the extended family. Nuclear family units went where they could find work. Even as a four year old, I remember the sense of isolation – different language, different culture, different economic situation. To add to the disorientation, Mamma descended into deep depression and took a year to recover.

But we weren't alone. The situation was happening to all Cubans who disagreed with Castro's regime. Even those who stayed in Cuba lost all private property – without recompense – “Para la Patria!”, for the State!

Fairness, in a sense, prevailed - and trust in God. As an extended family, We prevailed and rebuilt our lives – as did many other Cubans.

Fairness once again prevails. Rich and poor are impacted by COVID-19. Though some businesses are partially protected, almost all will be impacted– however temporary this time is.

We are in it together. Paradoxically, however isolated we feel, we're all practising social distancing together!

As for me, in service of the “we”, I will strive with all the energy God mightily inspires within me to rise to the opportunities to do acts of kindness and to add new and greater professional value at and beyond this time of COVID-19.

# PART 6

## Learning & Teaching

With the lockdown came a challenge for millions of people: homes schooling. For some daunting, for others an exiting challenge, and other responses besides. People with no teacher training are learning what it is to be an educator or provide childcare all day. This is a challenging time for parents and guardians, a time when they may have to learn to teach.

People who were working are now at home with time on their hands and the suggestion is often made that they learn new skills and treat it as an opportunity.

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### A parent's perspective: supporting human and family needs

Krushma Makwana

*Mother of two, Hertfordshire, UK*

From years of working in the corporate world, I have been taught to leave my personal self at home, but now work and home are one and the same, as we face isolation and lockdown. This means you can hear my kids on a call, or see them from time to time on a video call, and you know what, 'That's OK'. For others like me, who prefer to keep work and home separate, this is a massive challenge.

I am a business owner and working mum of two children aged five and three. The challenge of trying to continue to work and look after my children with my husband also working from home is a real struggle. Managing multiple agendas, be they education, free-time, meals, mental, emotional or physical support, not to mention the concern I have for our extended families, i.e. parents that also need our support and whom we will not physically see anytime soon.

I'm thankful for the technology that is enabling us to remain connected, and for the effort from the school's teachers who are doing their best to support us with learning activities to complete at home. However, even more important for me is the human perspective, supporting my children's mental wellbeing during this uncertain time.

It's all too easy to take for granted how they are feeling. I started our first day of 'isolation' with the usual routine of getting ready and having breakfast, followed by an early morning family workout (to use up some of their endless explosive energy), followed by a yoga session run by my five-year-old and meditation by me. I needed to calm them down to get on with some work (myself and them!).

When we finally sat down to work at 9.30am, I started day one by asking my children how they feel about all this information they are hearing about coronavirus, to which my three-year-old responded, 'I'm sad; people are dying.' I talked to them both about this to understand their sadness, worries and frustrations, and tried to help them see the silver lining (we can spend more time together as a family, not worry so much about our busy schedules) so, I related this to a 'pot of gold' at the end of the rainbow and asked, 'What would make you feel happy?', i.e. what's at the other side of the rainbow? to which my three-year-old continued

‘When people stop dying’. I was stunned; these little sponges absorb so much, from the media and what others around them are saying.

Physical and mental strength and toughness are being tested, for adults and children. In the early stages of ‘isolation’ and ‘lockdown’, anxiety levels increase for children who understand the implications, but my challenge is different with such young children who currently feel excited about a ‘long school break’, until they realise they cannot play in the park or meet friends. I know this current excitement will be short-lived, so how we manage this is so important.

Check in with your children regularly to find out how they’re feeling and encourage various forms of communication (not just verbal) i.e. younger children may prefer to draw or role play. Don’t dismiss what they say, acknowledge their response; if something is worrying them, use open questions, ‘what, why and how’, and let them know you’re there to support them.

The NSPCC suggests you can support children by:

1. Be patient, stay calm and approachable, even if their behaviour upsets you
2. Recognise that their feelings are valid and let them know it’s OK for them to be honest about what it’s like for them (manage your reaction and response)
3. Encourage them to talk to their GP, someone at their school or [Childline](#), especially if they’re finding it hard to talk

Before ‘cabin-fever’ sets in, create a space for the various needs within your family. If your space is limited, it’s an opportunity to become creative with what you have. Where possible, separate rooms for different uses and minimise distractions in each room. For example, if you have school-aged children who need space to study, create the right environment for them: conducive to focusing on their work, to minimise frustration and maximise productivity. Create a work-space for yourself which is away from the household chores, so that you can remain focussed. Declutter your ‘virtual environment’ by pausing your on-screen notifications and silencing your mobile phone. Send a message to your colleagues letting them know you’ll be focussed on something for the next hour to minimise distractions. By focussing on each task at hand you’ll be far more productive; this is true for everyone in your household. It’s advisable to think through and agree on a fun and flexible routine that suits your family – this way, everyone knows where they stand.

Focus on wellbeing: check in with yourself first, and then your family members.

There is a good reason why the safety advice on aeroplanes tells us to fit our own air supply first. If we as parents and carers aren’t OK, we cannot support those we are caring for. Do what you can for your mental health and wellbeing so that you are in a better position to help others. Try something new: meditation, yoga, run around your garden, stay connected with others (remotely).

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## Home-schooling: a teacher's perspective

Sam Heaton

*Sam is a high school English teacher from Manchester, United Kingdom*

The downsides of the coronavirus crisis are almost too many to mention. However, one major upside is that a sense of community has developed with people trying to help each other in any way they can. As a qualified teacher with experience of one-to-one tutoring, I believe the best way I can support my community is by offering some advice to parents who find themselves homeschooling their children for the first time.

1. Remember – you are already a teacher

You have always been your child's most important teacher, even before the crisis started. Most children learn to walk, develop a moral code, become fluent in a language and sometimes start to read before they ever step foot in a classroom. Teaching can sometimes be overwhelming but take encouragement from your previous successes. NASA scientists struggle to teach a robot how to walk.

2. Have a fixed routine

Several studies have shown that teenagers need up to ten hours of sleep a night. Any teacher who has stood in front of a sea of yawning faces at 8.30 a.m. can attest that most teenagers are not ready to learn when they arrive in the classroom. Starting the learning at 10:00 a.m. will provide enough time to wake up and get ready. Similarly, it might be tempting to carry on studies until late at night, but finishing earlier will give the children more time to relax before going to bed.

In a school day, pupils will have five hour-long lessons but this time also includes arriving and being registered. This may come as a shock to some parents but pupils can sometimes get distracted during this lesson time too! Simply put, a five-hour day does not mean five hours of focussed individual learning. Limit lessons to forty-five minutes with breaks.

3. Use the school's resources – but don't go overboard

Over the past couple of weeks, some teachers have worked tirelessly to create resources that pupils can use to continue their studies. These range from worksheets to online activities. The lessons should be easy to follow and will link to what pupils have been learning this academic year. When it comes to planning your lessons, this should be your starting point.

These are unprecedented times for teachers and most schools in the country will have panicked and sent home far too much work. When schools are reopened teachers will be flooded with a new set of lessons to plan and will struggle to mark the work that is done at home over the next few weeks. Don't worry about trying to finish all of the work. Instead, encourage your children to work to the best of their ability and progress through the work at a pace that suits them.

4. Anything can be learning

I often try to impress on disaffected teenagers that while an understanding of English literature is unlikely to be a major element of their future career, the skills that are learnt in an

English classroom are invaluable. English literature teaches logical thinking and expression of ideas concisely and clearly.

Try to find simple ways to turn your child's interests into a learning opportunity. If you watch a film together spend a few minutes discussing the themes and ideas. You are learning how to analyse a text. Even shows like The Simpsons can explore complex moral ideas. Get them to write a short review explaining what they liked or didn't like. It might not be a review of classic literature, but it's still engaging and relevant.

#### 5. Create your own school rules

This is a simple tool I have used with challenging classes and could be put to good use during this period of home-based learning. At the start of the day, agree on some simple rules that you both must follow when in the learning environment:

- Try your best
- Let others share their opinions and ideas
- Use polite language
- Read for half an hour a day
- No mobile phone use during lesson time

Agree on some rewards for following the rules and sanctions for breaking them. Having a copy of these rules on view will be a reminder to both parent and child of the basic expectations. The fact that the child helped to create the rules will make them more eager to earn rewards. I would recommend revisiting this occasionally.

#### 6. You are not alone

I do not speak Spanish but a few weeks ago I was covering a Spanish lesson as a supply teacher. What could have been an embarrassing disaster turned into a productive lesson for myself and the pupils. We used my subject ignorance to discuss problem-solving. By the end of the lesson, pupils had created a list of places they could go if they were stuck on their Spanish homework including textbooks, websites, and asking teachers for support.

This situation is bound to happen over the next few weeks when your child asks a difficult question. Don't make up an answer or change subject - encourage pupils to approach the problem with resilience and consider where the correct answer could be found.

Here are some ideas of places to search for answers to difficult questions:

- Contacting teachers. Many teachers will be more than happy to help pupils learn
- tes.com - A teaching website with hundreds of free resources
- genius.com - hundreds of poems and song lyrics explained
- bbc.co.uk/bitesize - A website with lots of simple explanations for topics
- mymaths.co.uk / hegarty-maths.com - Many schools have a subscription to these websites for their pupils where they can access online lessons and quizzes
- YouTube channels such as Mr Bruff (English), Joe Wicks (PE), Simple History (History)
- Duolingo - A free to use language learning software

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## Academics in pandemics

Carrie Oliver

*Teacher and specialist in Specific Learning Difficulties, Clevedon, North Somerset, UK*

My daughter is not a teacher; she runs her own business in finance. Now she is expected to home tutor an autistic six-year-old whilst entertaining her two year old. Her husband, who is also working from home and is happy to share teaching responsibility, is a key worker supporting a large IT network and hasn't been off the phone for a minute since his company's employees started connecting remotely.

It is frightening and daunting to be responsible for this little person's education. Not many parents have this primary role but there can be huge benefits for parent, child and their relationship as a family.

Routine is key. Young minds thrive on routine and boundaries. Of course, they like to break them but then there is fun (and learning) to be had in deciding on rewards and sanctions. Great negotiating skills required by all.

But the positives don't stop there. Suddenly this new parent-child relationship is turned on its head and new respect develops by both parties as control is gained over the situation. The child will receive the continuity of attention that is vital for his/her emotional development. Many childhood behaviours that are less than desirable are born from inattention. Not deliberate but just as a by-product of the rush that constitutes modern life. There is more considered time to get ready in the morning, time to build in breakfast when desired not dictated, time to talk and time to recognise our children's strengths and weaknesses.

This virus has caused massive anxiety not just to adults but to our children. They may be themselves less vulnerable but they will be consumed by fear for parents or grandparents. Even the little ones who don't directly understand why their world is upside down will absorb the general fear around them. However, they are wrapped in their familiar environment with the ones that love them the most and so we are right there to heal their disquiet as we calmly follow a new routine.

Then there is the learning itself. Maybe you feel 'under-knowledged'. The role doesn't require it. It's about facilitation and developing the softer skills of learning, the learner attributes. These are so vitally important for learner success and so difficult to measure in the school environment. How much encouragement does your child need to persevere at a task? Can they organise themselves? Can they find the right equipment to do the job? Do they learn better by watching or doing? What a privilege it is that you can directly support what they find more challenging and you get to watch their skills evolve. As parents, we don't often get the chance to see our children's academic profile in action.

The big plus that my daughter has experienced is being able to spike through a real element of 'fun' and the children themselves can be fully involved in the planning stage. She didn't know

that her child enjoyed cooking until the Maths challenge set by the school. He even ate the food which is not always a given.

Parents begin to see the relevance of their children's learning and integrate it without the artificial barriers of school vs home life. The children see their parents working from home and they start to develop an understanding of why we work. It can be a win-win.

I am not glossing over the squabbles and frustrations of being cooped up in small buildings. These are real. Discipline and allocated time slots interspersed with free negotiated rest and play zones can make you see your children in a whole different and vital light. Remember, quality time spent with your child is as vital as any educational experience. Embrace and enjoy this unique opportunity.

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## Learning is a result of listening

**P. J. Stevens**

*Southampton, United Kingdom*

Listening. It's a simple and effective tool that demonstrates respect, develops learning and builds inclusive communities, historically we learned to hunt and fish by listening to stories.

Good listening allows us to actively show we are paying attention. In the classroom or boardroom, listening helps us connect to thoughts, ideas, information, feelings and behaviours. It is crucial to maintaining productive relationships and is key to establishing quality communication.

The Chinese character for listening shows we need to listen with our whole being. Specifically, it identifies the need to listen with your eyes, heart and ears, to treat the other person as royalty and give them your undivided attention. Listening is not a spectator sport – as I am famed for saying - therefore we have got to get involved!

In a recent workshop I delivered, we discussed the value of listening and here's what people said happened when they felt listening was present in conversations:

- I feel valued
- What I have to say matters
- You care about me
- Listening helps me learn new things
- I get an emotional connection
- Being listened to helps me think things through
- Listening leads to clarity and understanding
- Develops trust
- I opened up more

We know listening skills are essential to many business roles and functions such as managing, coaching, mentoring, facilitation, negotiation and interviewing, to name but a handful. Good listening is also a vital part of decision making, reaching agreements, feedback, influencing and overcoming conflict and disagreements.



Without listening, no organisation can hope to operate or survive, though many pay scant regard to the ability of the organisation to listen. Perhaps in the future, this will be corrected. Effective listening is essential for the organisation to gather information required to enable it to adapt to meet the changing needs of staff, customers and the marketplace. Now, more than ever, we are facing changing needs. Ferrari (2012) identifies listening as the most critical business skill of all. He notes, 'listening can well be the difference between profit and loss, between success and failure', and goes on to say listening can be the difference between a successful career and a short one!

Listening benefits us professionally in many ways from improved leadership, learning and trust. Hoppe (2006) lists many professional advantages of active listening, indicating that it helps us to better understand and make connections between ideas and information; change perspectives and challenge assumptions; empathise and show respect or appreciation, which can enhance our relationships; and build self-esteem. Conversely, it is widely recognised that when people aren't listening, it becomes much more difficult to get things done effectively and trust diminishes leading to potential conflict and disengagement. Bell and Mejer, identify poor listening as a 'silent killer of productivity and profit,' and state that change becomes extremely difficult to implement in a work environment when people are not listening.

Listening is key in personal relationships. Steven Covey (Seven Habits) tells how a CEO of a 35,000 employee-business came to acknowledge the importance of listening after his wife told him that he didn't listen to their daughter. Having listened to that wonderful feedback, he honed his listening skills. He grew closer to his daughter and having learned the value of listening he applied it to his business.

Studies by Bommelje, Houston and Smither, show a strong link between effective listening and academic success, supporting previous research in this field linking listening skills to exam results. This finding is unsurprising as the better you listen at school, the better prepared you will be for your assignments and exams. It is quite simple really because when we listen we pick instructions, feedback, useful facts and insights that improve our learning journey and the quality of coursework.

Humans crave both certainty and uncertainty. We have our own unique levels and needs for both. Doubtless, it's a balancing act we constantly – often unconsciously - struggle to manage. If some things become more uncertain, such as now in lockdown, it is likely we will seek more certainty from where we can get it, such as key relationships, and we can give and receive more 'certainty' through better communication and listening. Listening lets us hear others and connect with emotions and needs, which increases the other person's self-esteem. If we are clear on our communication and believe we have been heard, we can feel more certain, more valued and this impacts positively on our place in life.

But how does all this help us in lockdown? Humans are social creatures, we are herd animals, and yet we are being asked to live in isolation.

Being on lockdown will put pressure on the few face-to-face relationships and the many virtual relationships we will be managing in these unprecedented times. Not just professional virtual work calls but personal calls with elderly relatives and at-risk family members. These calls to family members will almost certainly need extra care and attention, and may even stretch our listening and patience to breaking point. Imagine living alone and being uncertain, even scared; now think how important these virtual calls are for many people living in isolation.

Remember the Chinese character and treat these people like royalty and listen with all your being.

What are the barriers to us listening well to each other?

This list is by no means exhaustive, but here's what I hear often from people:

- Leaders think they know best
- People are busy and don't have time to listen
- There is insufficient trust or respect in the relationship
- Others don't value what I say
- My kids don't listen to me: they think I just 'blah'
- Past experiences with the other person get in the way
- I don't feel confident if I don't know the answers

In lockdown, we need to park our ego and some of the excuses that we use to not listen, and take advantage of this opportunity to learn and upskill ourselves, listen better, connect with others and, as Shay McConnon says 'listen people into existence'. However good we think we are at listening, now's the time for all of us to improve, or begin developing, listening skills.

Given that lockdown requires almost all conversation to be virtual, here are some tips to having better virtual conversations, and it's no surprise that listening is in there:

- Reduce or remove interference and distraction
- Prepare yourself to really listen and connect with the other person/people
- Turn off notifications on your phone and shut laptops
- Listen more
- Use verbal nods (ahs and hmms to show you are listening)
- Summarise and reflect more to check understanding
- Share thoughts and feelings out loud
- Value silence (active silence, not sleeping)
- Be respectful
- Ask more, and better, questions

Learning is a result of listening, at the individual through to the organisational level, from our very early days on earth to heady heights of leading and serving others in industry and government. Perhaps now as individuals, communities, and organisations, we need to start to listen at the greater and more pressing level of our planet. It seems to me that Mother Nature is crying out to have her message heard and her needs met. Will we listen and learn in time?

I strongly sense we need to listen and therefore learn our way into our future, together.

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## Surging to certainty

**Dr Mike Waters**

*Author, Gravesend, Kent, UK*

I've a friend who runs a major tyre company. Covid-19 could force him to send his employees home. Let's suppose it does. Now let's imagine what he might say to them through a Facebook video message.

Most of his people are men. Most are not especially well-educated, but the vast majority do a tough job well, and my friend has a lot of respect for them. He knows that most people wouldn't want to do the job of a tyre-fitter.

I'm sure my friend would have a lot of reassuring things to say, and the last thing he'd do would be to lecture about how they should be spending their time at home. But suppose he had an instinct that some of them might be willing to think about doing some kind of productive learning. He'd know that learning, the word itself, would be a turn-off for many. It would bring back negative memories of school and, in many cases, a process that was hard and humiliating. He'd acknowledge this, but he'd also remind them how they became skilled tyre-fitters: through practice, yes, but also through learning.

I don't think for a second he'd prescribe what they should learn, but I suspect he'd mention the interests of some of the individuals he knew about, and that this could be their opportunity to pursue these interests. "I know that Dave at X depot is mad keen on cooking and Steve at Y depot wants to learn French so he can chat to his wife's family. Maybe this is their chance to do some learning – and yours as well, if there's anything that grabs you."

It's quite possible that my friend would also offer learning materials for anyone who liked the idea of becoming a depot manager. Some of his workers definitely aspire to this.

My friend is canny enough to know that for many of his guys a leaning project would be the last thing on their minds. They'd be anxious, and anxiety is a bad learning state. It's hard to stay focused when your mind is troubled. He'd know that some of them wouldn't see the point of learning when the future was so uncertain, so I'm sure he'd tell them that a learning project might be one of the best ways to have some control over both their anxiety and their future. They'd be better "tooled up" for future opportunities. He'd also say that giving time to learning would make the time go faster, since he knew how little they liked standing around when there wasn't much to do.

Then he'd tell them something that would really get their attention: he'd tell them that they were one of the elite professions where highly skilled people had the ability to surge. He'd say that they were like A&E doctors and firefighters and SAS teams who had to do things in a really rapid and robust way. Tyre-fitters might not save lives (not directly) but they could perform casualty-like procedures on tyres and change them at lightning speed if necessary.

"And that ability to surge is what you could bring to any task you do, learning ones or any ones – building sheds, clearing a garage, learning the guitar – whatever." That's what my friend might say. It would acknowledge something most had never even thought about, and be a boost to their self-esteem. It would be truthful, not flannel.

He might add: "You are so used to changing tyres in a fraction of the time it takes Joe Public, and so good at it, why not bring the same surge skills to another task? Why wouldn't you want to get it done quickly? And all that time getting impatient on the forecourt when things go quiet. Well, that could now be a really good thing. It would make you surge even more, focus and take action."

In these uncertain times, the ability to surge when we want or need to could be one of our greatest capacities for staying positive and productive. Couple it with learning, and we've got an awesome strategy for thriving, not just surviving.

# PART 6

## Work and Organisations

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### Working from Home

Prof Peter Hawkins & Eve Turner

*Bath & Southampton, United Kingdom*

In these challenging and unprecedented times many of us are turning (even more) to virtual working. Whether this is as a coach, consultant, supervisor, team leader or CEO, we may have different experiences of doing this. Some of us may be experienced and feel relaxed; for others, this new way of working may seem daunting. But we all share a desire for connection, bringing people together and doing so in the best and most effective way.

We have produced a 12-point plan for remote conference hosts, to help you get the most out of your meetings and feel at ease. If in doubt, try to imagine this is a face-to-face meeting as far as possible, to guide how you facilitate/host.

1. Where possible, start a team-coaching relationship face to face, prior to transferring to a digital and virtual mode. Where this is not possible, potentially meet each team member virtually 1-2-1 before the first event.
2. Establish Virtual Team Protocols including staying fully present throughout – one example could be starting each day with a short team meeting to maintain connection and to enhance the sense of team.
3. Make sure you have a good internet conferencing platform which is secure.
4. There are often technical problems for someone on the call, so be prepared and then you (and others) will avoid getting flustered. It is rare that a large call has no issues.
5. Consider what people will see behind you – is it appropriate? Is it what you want to say about you? Many people need to work from their lounge or dining room and if you normally store alcohol on the mantelpiece behind you that may need a slight rearrangement!
6. Be conscious about how you could maximize non-verbal communication.
7. Arrange screens at the best angle so you are as visible as possible – you need to be as high up in the frame as possible so there is not a big gap between you and your ceiling. And ideally people will be able to see you gesturing with your hands. We also need to consider how natural light falls at different times of day, so we are not too bright or too dark.
8. Make a contract around recording sessions: you may need to, and then you can agree at the start of the call, noting that breakout rooms (see below) are never recorded, only the main meeting room.

9. Learn how to use shared screen and other facilities such as breakout rooms and whiteboard. With Zoom, remind people about speaker and gallery views, about private and public chat, mute/unmute, and how to save the chat box.
10. Start meetings with personal and social bonding time; we may not be in the same room, but it is important we act as if we are and allow people to have personal bits of conversation. We also need to ensure comfort breaks and time to get a drink. While people can do longer sessions successfully, a maximum of two hours is a good rule of thumb with one refreshment break, but starting at least 15 minutes early so that people can bond.
11. Then use an outcome-based check-in to establish people's aims and so everyone's voice is heard early on. End with an agreement about what people are doing next.
12. As team leader/facilitator, scan the team and ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute equally.
13. Many teams working in isolation are finding a short start-of-the-day meeting helps keep connected, aligned and focused.

#### References:

This short guidance draws on sections on virtual working in:

Hawkins P. (2017) *Leadership Team Coaching* London: Kogan Page

Hawkins, P. and McMahon, A. (2020) *Supervision in the Helping Professions*. (5th edition)  
Maidenhead UK: McGraw Hill

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## Business Continuity – a 20-point checklist

Tim Rogers

*Jersey, Channel Islands*

Using the following guidelines to write your plan will help analyse the risks and so minimise the impacts of a pandemic on your business:

1. Prepare for the potential loss of 50% of the workforce over one or more waves of a pandemic each lasting 12-15 weeks and occurring weeks or months apart.
2. Allow for relocating staff to other sites or homes to avoid crowded situations where infection rates will be greater.
3. Identify scenarios, e.g. working normally as far as is practicable, taking account of staff shortages and other related pandemic issues; or “shutting up shop” as far as possible.
4. Identify the Pandemic Incident Management Team (and a ‘back up’ team in the event of team members becoming unavailable).
5. Develop a Pandemic Operating Regime which should become operational during the Pandemic Outbreak phase (or earlier).

6. What will the trigger point be? Identify when the Pandemic Operating Regime will come into play. This could be when a previously determined number of staff become absent or when the government officially declares a pandemic.
7. What are the company's critical processes that will need to be sustained throughout?
8. Who are the critical personnel whom the company cannot do without?
9. Can other staff be cross-trained to take over in an emergency situation?
10. Communication – ensure staff, customers and other interested parties are kept informed of the company's preparedness planning for a pandemic situation and updates are issued regularly.
11. Staff welfare – refer to Government guidelines and establish a policy on staff welfare during a pandemic such as how to deal with infected staff, when to quarantine and offering counselling in the event of bereavement.
12. Review HR policies with regard to absenteeism, compassionate and sick leave, wages, etc.
13. Monitor events as they happen and be aware of government measures such as travel restrictions or quarantines.
14. Identify staff who can work remotely, either from home or another location.
15. Review IT and telecoms networks to allow for usage by remote workers (and increased customer usage).
16. Video-conferencing and other communication alternatives can be used to allow essential staff to continue working productively.
17. Supplies – how will critical functions be maintained if essential supplies are disrupted? Check suppliers have pandemic business continuity plans and make sure they are tested regularly.
18. Stakeholders – ensure they are aware of your pandemic preparedness planning.
19. Travel – establish how travel restrictions could affect productivity and how to deal with employees 'stranded' in other countries where a pandemic has been declared.
20. Test and test again – test plans frequently and as they are triggered by alerts. Review during each phase and update as necessary.

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## Leading through uncertainty

Andy Harmer

*Milenthorpe, Cumbria, United Kingdom*

### Solution Focus

The current circumstance tells us it's very easy to be sucked into being focused on the drama, detail and difficulties of problem situations. While it's tempting to do so (social media & the press encourage us to focus on problems), it's really important to keep a focus on what you're trying to achieve or where you want to get to and avoid being drawn into the minutiae of the problems that you're facing.

With this in mind, focus at the level of vision: what does success look like? Think about how you might bring that vision to life, and think about the plan you'll need to put in place to make it a reality.

In these early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, it's likely that people will be drawn into thinking very short term – today, tomorrow, next week. In due course it should be possible to start thinking about the medium and long term – next month, the next two or three months. As the focus switches to the longer term, keep thinking about what you want to achieve and how you are going to get there, developing flexible plans to make it happen.

#### Leadership in Society

COVID-19 has demonstrated the fragility of society, with people acting in a range of threat responses, and displaying selfishness and thoughtlessness. Equally it has brought to the fore the beauty that is in human nature with people demonstrating great generosity and kindness to others in greater need.

There is a need at all levels in our society for people to act with leadership and in service of the rest of humanity. This means role modelling acceptable behaviours, giving significance to society as a whole and playing a part in shaping the society that we want.

It means holding onto a vision of engaging and appreciating people around us and putting in place the practical ideas that will help society to function and work well.

It means acting and leading with social responsibility.

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## Leadership and Discretionary Effort

David Picton

*Oakley, United Kingdom*

### Leadership in Lockdown

Easing off my knees, I finished another prayer to live – to see my baby girls grow up, hold my wife again, drink tea with my mum and dad, have a beer with my brother. Pushing through canvas tent flaps into a desert sunset, I primed myself to brief the brilliant women and men under my command. Unsure of what the coming hours would bring, I hoped to inject their souls with glue to hold them together under the strain of doubt. Uncertainty was our only constant in utterly disrupted times.

As a military commander in the Afghanistan campaign and the Gulf War – with just weeks at home between the two back-to-back deployments – uncertainty was a perpetual tormentor. Injury, illness, capture or death were real possibilities, even under camp lockdown. Uncertainty is insidious, gnawing confidence away to undermine your emotional foundations as fast as you can build them. For me, one of the best ways to cope with uncertainty – even to thrive – is to lead.

Leadership is more than just a title or role, it is a state of mind. Authentic leadership inspires discretionary effort – a golden gift people choose to give. It shrinks the gap between a person's performance and what they're capable of – their true potential. Even tiny acts of humanity can motivate people to go beyond what's expected of them, drawing massive power

from the choice they made to offer that little bit extra. You can't buy discretionary effort – by definition, it can never be for sale.

Working with coaching clients as we headed into lockdown, most focused on three things – how to help their people with fear and uncertainty, how to keep teams together when they're not together and how to sustain spirits. Of course, it's exactly then – when it's hardest – that leadership is most valuable. As leaders, this is when we need to 'touch' people... without touching them.

In desert sands and cold mountains, on rainy exercise plains and in international business offices, I've repeatedly learned that leadership is about making decisions and generating momentum. Being tolerant of those who are crippled by uncertainty, admitting that we too are unsure, can unleash discretionary effort's transformational power.

I believe that six things can build it.

### **Values**

Your set of values define your character. Whilst they may overlap with others, they're rarely identical. Elvis Presley said that our values were like fingerprints – left on everything we touched. The strength in those values can ease uncertainty aside, and we owe it to ourselves to remain human, dignified and resilient under isolation.

### **Ownership**

The sense of ownership that we build in our teams, families and communities. Individual and group accountability weaves strong silver threads around the activities we undertake. Responsibility builds infectious assurance as others see us owning tasks like organising group calls, 'virtual coffee' webinars or a weekly 'happy hour' cyber-chat for a 'drink' together.

### **Inquisitiveness**

Inquisitiveness means always checking for better ways to do things, inviting questions and asking whether we need 'that process' at all. Creating an atmosphere of constructive debate and accepting occasional mistakes (in the spirit of 'trying new stuff') helps people trust that their inputs are essential to tackle common goals.

### **Challenge**

Leaders need to set sufficient challenge to generate momentum without overwhelming people. In uncertain times, even the perception of progress fosters cohesion. Sebastian Junger's excellent book *Tribe* includes multiple stories of human strength under adversity and great challenge – but coping with lockdown may be as simple as teaching children to cook five staple dishes, help a relative learn to use Skype or build some awesome core strength with that hitherto unopened yoga DVD.

### **Environment**

As leaders we craft an environment through the language used, the behaviours observed and the mindset adopted. Humans have a negativity instinct – amplified by the media – but leaders can build a 'rising tide that lifts all ships' and nurtures group energy through facts, perspective



and positivity. Under lockdown one night on military operations, we made a ‘bingo’ game out of a hundred numbered plastic bottle-tops and played for hours.

### **Storytelling**

The final component that builds discretionary effort is storytelling. Since cave-dwelling days, we’ve relied on them to build emotional and neural connections, up to five times more effectively than through statistics. Stories are how we shape our shared ‘why’ – a powerful antidote to uncertainty – and a top challenge is to tell them in under two minutes with prizes for the most inspirational.

These six things spell out **VOICES** – the voices of the people I’ve followed and the ones I’ve led. They have helped me to believe absolutely in the power of discretionary effort. Whilst humans go to incredible lengths for each other, leadership can nudge them even further. Amidst uncertainty, isolation, deprivation and the loss of freedom, leadership is one of the few things we can control and pay forward.

For me, lockdown means that I can’t see or hold my brother’s new baby – my first niece and long-awaited (for a few reasons). We’re sad that she may be three months old or more by the time we get to be with them properly. Perhaps we can write her a note for the future about the values we care about, the impact of owning a task, the power of questions, the goals we hope she challenges herself with and the environment we want her to live in... if we can make it a cracking story, she might even read it one day. The discretionary effort she may be inspired to give will never have a price tag, but it will leave us all richer anyway.

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## **What if this is an opportunity to think differently?**

**Anne McCarthy & Murray Cook**

*Preston, Lancashire & Edinburgh, United Kingdom*

How quickly our world shifted in just a few weeks. The speed of change created by the worldwide pandemic of COVID-19 is unprecedented in peace time. As the economic impact of the virus starts to hit, we have been discussing what this means for businesses as they lean into these economic realities with a social responsibility.

The pressure on leaders of business is enormous right now. The disruption we are experiencing is presenting a real opportunity for leaders to do work from the balcony (the ‘balcony’ perspective as a way of stepping back from events to understand them) and we have been inspired by some of the examples we have seen. From FTSE 100 companies to small businesses, there are leaders out there imagining a future.

David Potts, CEO of the UK supermarket chain Morrisons, described how the company has paid attention to its core purpose. He explained that the biggest contribution they can make in the country is playing their part in feeding the nation. Morrisons took the decision to make immediate payment to all their small suppliers and to redefine their definition of a “small supplier” adding an additional thousand suppliers into the small supplier category. Keeping the supply chain healthy is key to enabling their purpose. Having observed a dramatic shift in

consumer behaviour, they are now turning to new ways for customers to order food parcels and collaborating in new ways to expand their access and distribution capacity.

Leaders can do important balcony work now, look for new patterns, think about what it means to business not just in the crisis but beyond it too. This requires them to be realistic about the current situation and also provide hope for the future.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the daily routines of people around the world have been disrupted. These changes to the way people work, socialise, and even eat has made this a very real experience for people. Even before the virus makes members of their families unwell, there is a rise in anxiety as there is in any disruptive or uncertain environment. People are asking when it will be over, when things will go back to normal, who will make this better?

People look to leaders at this time to help ease their fear and to provide a sense of hope for the future. The burden is on leaders to reduce fear by thinking abundantly, providing a realistic view of the danger and being optimistic that if we take the right actions now, we will see an end to this that achieves the objective of protecting life.

Leaders need to experiment, test out new approaches and help people adjust to the new “normal”, assuring people that the changes they are making are worth it. They also need the courage to acknowledge vulnerability whilst looking to the horizon for solutions.

These questions from the Vickers strategy model can help.

Vickers was a key player in Churchill’s war ministry and was interested in what makes a good decision. His model asks us to think about situational context, what our values are and what our capability is. He asks:

- Where are the decisions being made?
- What is going on?
- How does the decision fit in with our values? Sometimes this gets missed as we struggle with targets, KPIs or shareholder value.
- What can we do? Given the context and our values, what do we have the capability to do?

In the examples quoted above, it is not so much about the quality of the decisions, as the future can’t be second guessed, but the authenticity and quality of the judgements.

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## **Tips for businesses to be visible during lockdown and the COVID-19 crisis**

**Fiona Scott**

*Journalist and media consultant, Wiltshire, United Kingdom*

As we move into this crisis where the world is slowing down – and so is business for most of us – it’s important to stay visible if you want to continue your business in the medium to long term.

Many people don’t take public relations seriously and see it as some kind of dark art. It is not and at this time it’s absolutely critical to survival in the long term even if it won’t deal with

short term losses. It's now that people are going to start to learn how important public relations really is and I hope, for most of you, that it's not too late.

Professionals like me are being cut left, right and centre as business owners hurry to cut costs, even though we should be the people helping you deal with this situation by making you and your business stand out. Over time the brands and SMEs which survive will be those who keep working with people like me all over the world – either to run things or simply to train you to do it yourself.

One key thing to do is this: write a list of keywords based around subjects you can talk about with authority. Think about your expertise, business product or service and, of equal importance, your personal circumstances. Be a human being, not just a business person.

Think what other things about your life might be of interest. Think of your life as a magazine with different sections, e.g. I'm a parent, I love caravanning, I'm a bookworm, I'm a step-parent, I'm gay, I'm one of three children, I'm single, etc. Consider which of those things you are happy to talk about. Then later when you write articles include relevant keywords from that list to make that article, blog, post searchable. This is basic preparation to embrace being more visible.

Here are just a few things you can do to deal with this crisis today.

Accept your new reality – promote a positive message of how you are flexing, pivoting, changing your business, products or services to your existing audiences and on your website. If your business needs to be dormant, tell the truth, be upfront with information. Share photographs of the reality of working from home for you. Don't be afraid. Most of us are in the same boat.

Don't whinge and whine on social media (except in closed groups that you trust), don't issue passive-aggressive messages, don't try to sell by sending direct private messages to people. All of this will damage your reputation.

Blog, blog, blog – come up with a blogging plan and consider how often to blog in your new reality that you can sustain and be consistent. These are short-form articles showcasing your business/service/expertise and include details of how to buy from you in a gentle manner. Once you've decided where to blog (website, LinkedIn or other platforms) be consistent and regular. Always include at least one picture.

Don't think 100 words is enough for a blog. However, don't write a 3,000-word essay. You are not writing a book here, you are showcasing a little of your expertise. Don't just sell, sell, sell or people will not engage.

Embrace video – if you've avoided video then now is the time to get over yourself and go for it. You could vlog instead of blog, or do both. Again think about the message, what are you trying to get across and plan some content around it. You could do some content for Facebook Live or start a YouTube channel and film it yourself with your smartphone, tablet or a digital camera. Keep selling messages subtle.

Don't make a dull film listing all of your services or products. It needs to be interesting, have value for the viewer, and strike a positive tone. While you can have a selling message, keep it gentle and avoid the hard sell. Listen to feedback and don't be offended by comments, better to be trying and learning than taking no action at all.

Engage with the media – the media are proving at this time how critically important they are in our society. It's easy to criticise them but the information they are providing is crucial – how would the government even begin to communicate with us without the traditional media? However, the media is made up of people, the majority self-employed and working from home and they are desperate for content. Ensure you can be found on the internet when they are searching for something relevant for you and your business. Coronavirus will be the major theme for weeks to come. But journalists will be looking for positive, anti-coronavirus stories too. Journalists can be found across social media – search for them.

Don't demand that journalists write about you, it's not their job to do that. If they do, don't complain about the one word they got wrong in the 500 words they wrote about you. They are human and they are summarising the 1000 or 10,000 words you shared with them. Don't sweat that kind of detail. You want them to come back. Don't insult the local media. They are actually the route to the client who doesn't know you yet, most SMEs get their business locally.

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## Dealing with uncertain times – the future of work

Kevin McAlpin & Cora Lynn Heimer Rathbone

*Essex & Herfordshire, UK*

“You never let a serious crisis go to waste... it's an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before.”

- Rahm Emanuel

Take control of what you can control – your own development and increased self-awareness, the kindness you extend to others, the compassion you show to others, the resources you share free of charge or no strings attached. Do new things that you “think you could not do before”.

Step back and review and reconsider what we do, who we are and how we want to be in the context of what is really happening. Reconnect with your purpose in life. Reflect on and honour the past. What progress have you made towards what is important to you in your life and look to embrace the future? Based on the trends, what will the new normal look like? Reflect on the times of greatest success and draw out repeating/underpinning themes – ensuring you are “Living the life you were meant to live”.

Focus on your mental wealth, meaning your physical, emotional, mental, relationship and financial wellbeing; this will support your resilience and the ability to adapt. Change your mindset, focus on the positive, physically exercise, go for walks in nature where safe to do so, “eat together” by Zoom, Skype, read together and share ideas from what you've read.

Play to your strengths and most importantly be guided by your purpose and values.

Connect, support and show empathy to each other and be open and honest so people know the truth. Focus on wellbeing, collaboration and trust using the principle and platform of Whatsapp, Homeparty, Zoom, Skype, stay connected.

Utilise collective intelligence to enable us to make the best decisions, be creative, adapt and invite others to collaborate. In human development what most differentiated homo sapiens

from our closest cousins – Neanderthal Man, Homo Erectus, etc – several of which had larger brains and stronger bodies, was our ability to collaborate, to come together to make things happen. According to Charles Darwin, survival does not belong to the fittest but to those most able to adapt.

Take action to gain momentum, be ready for in-course correction. Set up a network of one or two people or even four people where they hold each other to account and get through this together.

The things that are important to us and our human needs at this time are being truly tested. Under threat most people sit down and narrow their focus and energy as if we are going to be eaten or be attacked. We don't look forward and wide.

### **Human Needs**

Be proactive in how you satisfy these needs, especially at times of uncertainty. There are eight core human needs. We need to consider what we need and what our families, colleagues and friends need in times of uncertainty. Building on the combined thinking of Anthony Robbins and David Rock, who both bring together a wide range of research from psychology and neuroscience, these human needs are:

#### **Purpose**

Perhaps most importantly, we also have an intense need to contribute to something greater than ourselves. We need to share what we have with others to get the most fulfilment out of life. Our talents and belongings do little to help us if we keep them just to ourselves. It's a human need to give, protect and serve others. Establish what gets you up in the morning – what talents you bring to this world. What are 'the works' that you feel your god or parents prepared in advance for you to do?

#### **Certainty**

We have a deep need for certainty in life – we crave stability in our relationships, health, and financial wellbeing. Clarity of expectations and an alignment of purpose and values gives us this. We seek safety, security, comfort, order, predictability, control and consistency. Second only to the physiological need to survive through food, shelter, companionship is the need to trust. People seek clarity and often the last thing we cling onto is the need to control. Focus on trust and where you place your trust, if we have this it changes everything.

#### **Significance**

We also have a deep need to stand out and be visible to other people, to have status and a reputation. We want to avoid being invisible and irrelevant. We need to feel understood, special, have pride, feel needed, wanted and have a sense of importance and worth. Reflect on your life: what has made you stand out or have a sense of significance in the past? How can that be revived or repeated?

#### **Variety**

At the same time, we need surprises and adventure in life. We do not want to be bored by experiencing the same predictable things every single day. We need surprise, challenges,

adaptability, excitement, difference, adventure and change. Proactively plan your week and month to establish patterns and rhythms that keep you curious and constantly learning, especially if you are constricted in what you can do through self-isolation and social distancing.

### **Autonomy**

Autonomy gives a person a sense of control over what they do. Without independence we can feel under threat and stressed. It is crucial to feel we have options, have a voice, can make decisions, are empowered, can influence, have freedom, independence, we are an individual with opportunity and a freedom of choice. We live in paradoxical times: working from home can make it seem we have all the autonomy in the world; but we are constrained from interacting socially in person with others. The ability to interact with who we chose to relate has been stripped away. Learning to take control over what you have autonomy over and learning to let go of what you can't control will be so important over the next few weeks.

### **Connection**

Beyond having significance to others, we also have a deep need to be connected and loved for who we are. We do not want to be left disconnected, alone, and unappreciated. We're social animals, and we naturally form social groups, tribes and build relationships. These groups build mutual trust and form a barrier against the unknown. We need love, communication, empathy, approval and to feel connected to others. Belonging is an unspoken benefit of working in a team, being part of a family or group of friends. Ensure you are part of a coherent and collective unit striving for a bigger purpose than you could achieve alone. Stay connected and build on the interdependencies of the team or unit to which you belong.

### **Growth**

We need to feel like we are always growing and making progress. We do not want to feel like we are standing still, or stagnating. We need continuous emotional, intellectual and spiritual development and learning. Continuous learning is a hallmark of high performing individuals and high performing teams. AI is fundamentally a "learning machine", a machine that has been programmed to continuously learn. If we are not also continuously learning, we make ourselves as humans obsolete. Ask yourself and seek feedback from others on:

- What went well?
- What could have gone better?
- What could I/we have done that I/we didn't do?

### **Fairness**

We need transparency, candour and things to be simple. Doing the right thing builds trust and collaboration. If a person thinks something is unfair, their brain automatically goes into defence mode – fight, flight, freeze. We need straightforward, honest conversations. We need balance, give and take, openness and fair treatment. "IT'S NOT FAIR!" is one of the earliest cries from very young children playing with other children. How "fairly" are you working and playing in times of uncertainty? How reciprocal is your concern for others?

Things can and will get better.

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## COVID-19 and UK SMEs

Paul Seabridge

*United Kingdom*

COVID-19 is unprecedented. Whilst I have lived through the dot-com bubble, 9/11, SARS, 2008 crash and MERS, the current situation is like nothing I have seen before. I think the impact on the global economy and the way many governments around the world have reacted shows the seriousness of the situation.

Before I start, I think it is important to add that whilst this article will focus on the financial support offered by the UK government, we should not forget the number of people affected by this and those who will unfortunately lose their lives. But as a glimmer of hope, there is positive news about the use of the drug chloroquine showing positive signs in treating this virus; the US has just approved a \$1.8Tr stimulus package; the UK government has approved £330bn of support to business and many other governments around the world are showing the same. Yesterday (24th March) saw a rally on stocks.

This advice is specific to UK-based SMEs (and will no doubt change as the situation develops):

### **Business grant scheme**

Government grants will cover 80% of the employment costs of PAYE employees who would otherwise have been laid off, backdated to 1 March 2020, up to a cap of £2,500 per month. It is intended that the scheme will run for at least 3 months from 1 March 2020 and this may be extended if necessary. It is at the employer's discretion whether to fund the difference. Someone already let go can be brought back and the termination in effect reversed.

The scheme will be open before the end of April. HMRC are working to develop their systems to allow payments to be made to employers.

PAYE and NIC will continue to apply as normal on payments to furloughed employees. A grant receipt is taxable income for the business, but salary expenses will be offset.

### **Statutory Sick Pay relief package for SMEs**

Small and medium-sized businesses and employers can reclaim up to two weeks' Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) per eligible employee paid for sickness absence due to COVID-19. The rate of SSP is £94.25 per week.

If you're a director of a limited company, you can pay yourself two weeks of SSP if you need to self-isolate subject to meeting the minimum salary requirement for SSP of at least £118 per week (£6,136 per annum).

The eligible period for the scheme will commence the day after the regulations on the extension of SSP to those staying at home comes into force and this applies to SMEs with 250 employees or less at 28 Feb 2020.

The method for reclaiming the SSP has not yet been announced at the time of writing.

### **Deferral of VAT payments**

The next quarter of VAT payments will be deferred, meaning businesses will not need to make VAT payments until the end of June 2020. Businesses will then have until the end of the 2020-21 tax year to settle any liabilities that have accumulated during the deferral period. The deferral will apply from 20 March 2020 until 30 June 2020 and applies to all UK businesses. The deferral applies automatically. VAT refunds and reclaims will be paid by the Government as normal.

### **HMRC Time To Pay scheme**

HMRC have always had the discretion to agree payment terms for taxes where businesses are struggling financially. They are now offering more generous payment terms for taxes.

We have seen businesses being given up to at least mid-June to pay February, March, April 2020 PAYE bills, with the arrears being payable thereafter via a payment plan.

Call HMRC's dedicated COVID-19 helpline on 0800 0159 559.

### **Retail, hospitality and leisure businesses – grants and rates relief**

No rates are payable for the 2020-2021 tax year. Grant funding of £25,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with property with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000. Grant funding of £10,000 for businesses in these sectors with a rateable value of under £15,000.

### **Grant for recipients of small business rate relief**

A one-off cash grant of £10,000. Small businesses already receiving small business rate relief (generally, businesses with one property with a rateable value <£15,000) and/or rural rate relief, based in England, and occupying property. The cash grants will be administered by local authorities. Your local authority will write to you if you are eligible for this grant. Wales is adopting similar measures.

### **Business rates holiday for nursery businesses**

No rates payable for the 2020-2021 tax year. There is no action required. The rates relief will apply to your next council tax bill in April 2020. However local authorities may have to reissue your bill automatically to exclude the business rate charge which will be done as soon as possible.

### **Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme**

Loans of up to £5 million, interest-free for 12 months. The borrower remains liable for 100% of the debt. The lender receives a guarantee of 80% of the loan amount from the Government to enable more loans to be approved. At the discretion of the lender, the scheme may be used for unsecured lending for facilities of £250,000 and under.

### **Practical Steps**

Prior to COVID-19, the statistics for SMEs made grim reading. There is this glamour to becoming an entrepreneur and starting your own business, but it's probably one of the toughest careers you could choose.



95% of start-ups fail in the first five years, only 1% make it to £1m in revenue, and only 0.1% make it to £10m. But even when you do make it, it's difficult for SMEs to access the capital they need to be able to grow.

They either go to their bank and have to put up personal assets as security or end up giving away a large chunk of the shares in the business in return for what is in the grand scheme of things not a lot of capital from investors/private equity. Potentially they also lose some control in the process.

Now more than ever there is a need to collaborate, find joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions to both survive and grow the business in these uncertain times.

Whilst I am not one to speculate, with £330bn of stimulus offered, that's a lot of money to be repaid when we get back to some sort of normality. Expect tax rises and inflation.

Looking at your business today, think about who in your sector could you approach to collaborate with. Whether it be a joint venture, a merger, or even an acquisition?

Maybe it's a competitor that serves a different area than you do. Maybe it's a business that offers different services than you do but sells to similar clients. Maybe it's a business that supplies you.

If you found a way to collaborate, whether informally through a joint venture, or formally through some form of merger or acquisition, think about the benefits:

- Economies of scale – are there internal functions that could be shared across the business, so you reduce costs?
- Buying power – if you are all buying similar things, taking a “larger order” to your supplier will drive bigger discounts.
- Best practice – if one business in your consortium does something better than you, then emulating their techniques could drive increased efficiency and profitability.
- Value – a diverse and larger revenue/market share will make the group of companies more valuable – that is why larger companies sell for a higher multiple than a standalone SME. Kingston University says the average SME sells for 2.2 x profit. Whereas larger businesses with £75-100m+ revenues sell for a much higher multiple. Public companies in the main are double-digit multiples.
- Sharing – imagine if you were in business right now with several others, sharing these challenging times, instead of being on your own. Would it make it easier to navigate?
- Capital – a larger business has access to more and will find it easier to obtain capital to grow. This is because it poses less risk to an investor or lender – for all the reasons stated above. Think about it, let's say currently one of your major clients stops doing business with you and another goes bust. That could wipe out your business. But in an enlarged group, whilst it would have a negative impact, it would not necessarily wipe the business out, so it has less risk.

So now, more than any other time I have seen, is the time to collaborate. If you are working in your business rather than on it, you will struggle to grow. As the business owner, leave the day-to-day operational management to your key management team (if you don't have one, find one) to free your time up to find joint ventures, mergers and acquisitions. You can work on the business, not in it.

### Other Practical Steps

- Work with your suppliers.
- Communicate with your suppliers to tell them what you are doing and why, and find out what they are doing. Try and have an open dialogue about how you can work together. Negotiating payment plans and deferment of amounts due.
- Work with your customers.
- Think creatively about how you can continue to sell to your customers without jeopardising the health and safety of your workforce to try to get cash flowing in again.

# PART 7

## Personal Stories

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### A pensioner's perspective

David Walker

*Melksham, Wiltshire, UK*

Georgina, my wife, and I are typical of those born shortly after the end of World War II. Our parents were typical of their generation, and their parents' generation - the women looked after the home, the men went out to work. This was the husband-wife relationship that Georgina and I grew up in, and to some extent was reflected in our relationship when we got married in 1971, though I would like to think that it was our generation that started the breakdown of these stereotypical husband/wife roles.

Shortly after our son was born, Georgina went back to work (there was no maternity leave/pay in those days and we needed the money) and continued there until our daughter was born three years later. This time, Georgina did not go back to work until our daughter started infant school. Up to this point, our marriage still followed the traditional format of our parents. It was a standing joke that I always needed to be somewhere else whenever a nappy needed changing (the irony is that Georgina is now doubly incontinent - her revenge for my absconding from nappy duty all those years ago).

As Georgina's condition deteriorated, her ability to perform these tasks became more difficult for her. Simple processes such as how to turn on the oven, operate the microwave, and put washing powder and conditioner in the washing machine before switching it on eluded her.

The result - a lot of takeaways, readymade meals, burnt offerings, shrunken jumpers, grey whites, un-ironed bedding, curtains that needed shortening, etc.

This was when the limitations of my domestic capabilities really started to kick in.

Now you could say the wheel has turned full circle, but with a twist. Georgina is now classed as having advanced late-stage Alzheimer's. Everything she would normally do for herself, I now have to do for her. From wiping her nose to wiping her bottom, brushing her hair to brushing her teeth, getting her showered, dried and dressed, even buying her clothes. Everything we would have done together, is now done by me alone - decorating, housework, hanging out the washing, making the bed (Oh, the arguments we would have about the best way to put the duvet cover on!). Everything I would normally have responsibility for, I still have responsibility for - managing the finances, gardening, household maintenance, etc.

Attending a cookery course recently for over 65 men only is a great help, though I'm still not sure what the top oven is for (other than the grill). Maybe there could be a course on getting to know your oven, basic nutrition and what all those bizarre symbols mean on food packaging. I have also attended courses on bread making, cooking with chicken, a one-day Thai cooking masterclass and a seniors' half-day basic cooking course. All very helpful in their own

way, but none of which looked at the topic from a male perspective. Indeed at most of these courses I was the only male, and certainly the only male over 65. My casseroles are to die for (not literally), what I cannot do with an avocado isn't worth doing. Baking bread and cakes is no longer a challenge, and my spices and herbs carousels get admiring glances.

Then there is the iron. To steam or not to steam? That is the question (everything is on steam). Maybe a topic for another course?

In addition, how many male carers can use a sewing machine? I can. There are courses on how to use a sewing machine (great if you need to hem up the too-long net curtains), but not for men only, again I was the only man.

Maybe I'm not that useless after all, although as it used to say on my school report, there is 'room for improvement'.

Now to the lockdown and isolation. The power of mashed potato! I make up pots of mashed potato and freeze them. Each pot serves two people and has a greaseproof layer to divide each portion. I can then get one out of the freezer and microwave (three mins on high) if we are having a meal requiring mash. I also mix other bits in with the potato. My favourite has savoy cabbage mixed in. I have sent my grandchildren a photo and told them to do the same with their potato so they won't have to keep going to the shops.

How am I coping mentally, physically, and financially? Mentally I am doing well, I am an eternal optimist: things will get better. Glass half full. Emotionally, the lump in the throat, the tears in the eye are not far away, especially when I am on my own. I think why me? We have been together for 55 years and my goal is to get beyond our 60th anniversary. Financially, we are wiped out, we have released equity as the expense of caring for someone at home is so high. Physically I am OK, I have an annual check and I am one of the fittest 73-year-olds in Wilshire. My exercise is in the garden and my humour and positive mindset are vital.

My advice is to keep positive, my parents' generation lived through two world wars. Keep positive, I am sure we will get through this.

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## Parents of teenagers listen up!

Claire Donald

*Teacher, United Kingdom*

I'd never normally use this kind of language, or speak this way to parents. But we are in extraordinary times. There are reports of groups of teenagers hanging around together and ignoring the lockdown.

You need to step up to the plate, and tell your kids they cannot go out! You are the adult. Take responsibility. Sit them down and speak to them bluntly; if you need to frighten them, then frighten them. That statement is hard for me to make and is counter-intuitive but desperate times call for desperate measures. Do what you need to do to make them understand. This is way too serious to shrug your shoulders and put down to 'teenage years'. We know how stroppy and bombastic they can be but you are the parent. Start calling the shots; use kidology – it still works with teenagers!

Ask them, if a mad man was on the street with a gun, would they go outside? Take no notice if they answer yes, they would still go out. Their answer doesn't matter and it's not worth arguing about. The fact that you have planted that seed will give them food for thought. They will still strop about being confined, they won't want to lose face, but they will more than likely comply. (Obviously do not say anything about the mad man in front of younger kids though!)

If your teenager insists on going out and you have tried your very *very* best then phone the police. It won't be easy to report your own child but needs must and you have to do what you have to do. Look; your child may end up angry with you and hate you for what you have done but you have to do whatever is necessary to protect them, you and others. They will understand, when a little time has passed, that you acted out of love and the need to be a responsible citizen at this difficult time.

While they are confined, let them play on their iPads. Everyone is going to be a little on edge but again, I ask you to remember that *you* are the grown up. You can control your behaviour more easily than your teen. Be kind, ask if they will teach you how to play a game. Ask them if they could help you do something so they feel included, but don't press them if they don't want to.

Ask them if they can play with a younger sibling because they are a bit worried about everything and could do with a big brother or sister to help them.

Think of daft games to play, ask them to do some exercises with younger members of the family. Remember, much of the time your stroppy teen is really a confused little kid inside. Be patient, be patient, be patient.

One last thing, when asking teens to do something, reframe your request: "Can you come and eat your tea before it gets cold? Thank you!" Teachers know that if you ask and say "thank you" instead of "please" there is an expectation that they will conform and guess what... they usually do.

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## The creative revolution of improvisation and interactivity

Tamás Szabó

*Musician, Budapest, Hungary*

We are thrilled to see the community connect. Helping hands are feeding the elders and overwhelmed nurses and doctors. Teachers are giving classes online, coming to terms with this unprecedented situation. Artists, actors and bands are performing live-stream shows. Physicians, trainers, yogis are doing online classes. The community are taking one big step out of their comfort zone.

But how did we get here?

Fear is fed into us! Stress levels increase and are holding us down, taking our freedom and creativity. People are at home, stuck, questions swirling around in their head. The virus is stirring up the swamp and compressing stress into their minds. We are getting tired, our bodies are giving up!

The COVID-19 virus situation forced all venues to close. Universities, schools, preschools and playgrounds are empty. Companies try to survive by sending employees home to work. People hoard supplies, fearing an unknown future.

As a musician, teacher and coach I felt the immediate impact. All my concerts, interactive programs and events were cancelled. Workshops and meetings with clients postponed. My calendar is empty! I have no income! Depression is lying in wait for me!

Why am I doing what I'm doing? What do I stand for? What are my beliefs? Who am I?

The word *crisis* derives from the Greek word *κρίνω (krino)* meaning: "To decide, consider, as preferring one thing over another or determining the correctness of a matter".

The current crisis is an opportunity to consider, decide and take the turning point in our lives.

The lyrics of our song – 'Breathe In' – rushed through my spine, challenging me:

The fear of failing, it's all in your head!  
Just stop for a second and take a step back.  
Please look for the things you forget.  
Lay down, let them take over.

Breathe in, enjoy!  
Listen to your heart pounding full of joy.  
Find your balance and take the first step.  
Find yourself and take the step!

It's time to slow down, self-reflect and learn about the possibilities of interactivity and acceptance.

Changing the perspective gave me a broader view of the current situation. This is not about me, nor about a virus. This is about humans as a species, connecting back with ourselves and interacting with the power of unconditional love. Essential!

We are dealing with a situation never seen before, but the question remains the same: “How can I help?!”

So we sat down with the band, the choir, with fellow teachers and coaches: “Let’s rethink our options, looking forward.”

Support groups formed and calmness arrived! Boosted common creativity showed us the way: “*We are all free to improvise and use our skill sets.*”

We won’t cancel our performances! Working together with *Trip Boat Budapest*, an action team worked out the basis for the Quarantine Theatre and we played the first show with the band *Deadly Mantis*. A coincidentally fitting name to start the program series with another “plague”.

The venue can accept 350 people, but the stream was seen by over 12,000 people.

Since then, there has been a show every evening with thousands of viewers online. New Facebook groups have formed with thousands of followers sharing live-streamed shows with each other from all around the world, supporting artists.

We won’t stop teaching and learning! Teachers working together day and night formed new online classes, helping one another to set up their class schedules. Kids are learning from home, engaging in fun extracurricular tasks. Parents see their kids involved and excited about learning in a new way.

The phase of shock is no more. Coming to terms with all these new ideas has slowed us down and stress is slowly dissolving. The new phase of recovery is on its way. Easter will bring us redemption!

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV)

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

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## Solitude may be bliss

Sarada Thompson

*Carmarthen, United Kingdom*

It was finally announced on the BBC by the Prime Minister calling the country into a Coronavirus Lockdown. It was about the beginning of March, when my brother in Australia advised me to prepare for social isolation.

I googled and found there was actually an official term: ‘preppers.’ Mostly associated with Doomsday-Apocalypse predictions, this was amongst the middle-aged, who fantasised about a nuclear conflict. However, the most recent who came out on social media were quite down-to-earth housewives. I typed ‘emergency food storage’, and was taken aback not only by such a site being listed, but that freeze-dried food was already in short supply, indicating both high demand and short supply. I consulted with my family and far from being really worried, there was ridicule at such a suggestion. I decided to use my savings to buy a month’s worth of food for the six of us.

Seeing the panic buying soon after, especially for toilet paper, I tried to buy this online together with hand disinfectants. Finally I accessed a year-old account of ‘Who Gives A Crap?’ –

toilet paper made from bamboo – and managed to get a delivery. As for soaps, I had collected special scented Indian soap to tuck away in my clothes drawers, as my mother had.

Yesterday, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020, the Prime Minister called for an official Coronavirus Lockdown. Of course, it is a very difficult situation. In my case, I have had periods of being alone, limiting my choices for going out to socialise. For me, solitude may be bliss, but imposed loneliness could be a curse.

It took twelve years for them to diagnose LOMS – Late Onset Multiple Sclerosis. The only treatment offered was Metrataxate, which the consultant also warned may have adverse effects on my kidneys and liver in ten years. I declined and turned to alternative therapies, adopting a gluten-, sugar-, and dairy-free diet. ‘Glutton-free!’ I joked. Already a vegetarian, but a keen cook, it was not difficult. I used a folding walking stick, ankle-camp-boots and a French-style beret. One artist thought my walking stick was an affectation!

I do not know when, but I became friends with MS. Over the years, there were many adaptations, until I had no choice but to accept a wheelchair. I opted for a mobility scooter; my long years of driving stood me in good stead. I chose not to elicit sympathy from people, which was imperative to me.

We moved from a five-acre smallholding with horses, dogs and cats, and into town for convenience. However, for the last seven years, my condition deteriorated; I became increasingly bed-bound or confined to my electric wheelchair. I gave my shopping list and purse to my husband and as I struggled to get in and out of the car, I resorted to shopping online. It became easier to stay at home. Whenever I needed medical assistance I rang the doctor and they started to suggest home visits.

It started with intermittent self-isolation, which became longer. I lived with many limitations: bladder, bowel, balance and mobility, impaired sensory feeling, which means I can only type with my right index finger. It’s the simple things in life that have become insurmountable – like getting-up by myself, brushing my teeth or transferring from seat to seat. I used to enjoy vacuuming, washing up and loved cooking. Sometimes I wish I could be me, as I used to be, but then, wait, what and who was that, but a memory?

Of course, it is a restriction, but maybe it was growing slowly. I found I was learning to live with myself. I had always been my own enemy, criticising and being really hard on myself.

It was observing lifelong spiritual practices that has helped most. Sharing it with my brother, and until recently with my mother, talking almost every day over the miles has strengthened our bond. Sharing this with my husband and a few close friends has also enriched me.

Having more time has made me reliant on my inner self. MS has become a lifelong companion. Sometimes it wins, sometimes I do.

I even consciously talk to myself. I am increasingly talking to different parts of my body, but not as harshly as I used to.

To escape from aches and pain, I lose myself in my passions of writing and drawing. MS has enabled me to do more of this than I might otherwise have made room for.

I would love to go back to driving, striding, skipping, doing the ten things I did all at once. It hurts to be unable to do these things. But, solitude has kept the noise of the world away and has opened a window to help me find a special space within me.



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## Views from a Spanish balcony

Mark Edgerton

*Near Barcelona, Spain*

For the last seventeen years, I have lived just outside Barcelona. My husband Jose and I live with our two cats in a comfortable but modest apartment in a quieter part of town, a few minutes' walk away from the (normally) bustling tourist-packed centre.

So, here I find myself sitting at a little wooden table on our balcony. I am surrounded by potted plants, looking out over our tiny narrow street, drinking my coffee and thinking back on recent events brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. I am reflecting on how all of this is affecting me personally, and also on the impact it is having on the culture in which I now live.

We are half-way through the proposed nationwide lockdown, referred to as “la cuarentena” in Spanish. But who knows if it will be extended?

I commute regularly to the UK for work, and because I speak Spanish and French, I am often jetting off all over the globe. Putting it mildly, I am not proud of my carbon footprint. Bizarrely, I was recently talking with friends and colleagues about the fact that I would like to travel less, and my plan was to use 2020 as a year in which to reduce my workload, to free up some time to reflect upon other types of work I might fancy doing a bit closer to home. “Be careful what you wish for”, as the ancient Chinese saying goes.

I specialise in well-being and resilience. I have been teaching techniques of present-moment awareness (sometimes called mindfulness) for the last twenty years. It is fascinating to practise mindfulness techniques on myself, observing my thoughts, and noticing those times where I am perhaps wishing things to be different from how they currently are, thereby creating a raft of uncomfortable feelings inside myself such as annoyance, boredom, or frustration. It is a great lesson for me to practise what I preach around being fully present to an experience, and to be curious, open and non-judgemental. Some days this is easier to do than others.

Under lockdown, we are allowed out to go food shopping. On day one of our confinement, lots of people (including myself) dashed out to the shops. There was no “panic” buying such as we see happening in some parts of the UK, yet in the supermarket that first day, I found myself buying a few more tins and packets than normal – and noticed everyone around me doing the same. That has calmed right down now. The supermarkets have good supply chains and restock their shelves regularly. The fruit and vegetable co-operative across the road is a veritable cornucopia, and we count ourselves very fortunate to have fresh food available each and every day.

So I am glad to say that I have stopped “dashing” to the shops. In fact, I treat my outings into town as something to be savoured. “Mindful shopping”, I have started calling it. I walk slowly (where else do I need to be?), enjoying the sunlight and a gentle breeze on my face. Numbers are limited to a few at a time, so I stand patiently in line outside the shops until they call me in. One in, one out. Once inside, we are all given plastic gloves, and we respectfully keep our distance from one another. Most shops have placed lines of tape on the floor (even on the

pavement outside) to mark two-metre gaps. The urge to buy extra quantities of food has gone. We all buy only what we need for a few days. And it works. Because I no longer feel the need to rush and dash around the shops, I enjoy deliberately taking my time to choose items, and to really appreciate “the joy of shopping”.

On a more general note, it is interesting to observe how here in Spain people have accepted and adapted to the lockdown without complaint. They understand that this is a societal and communal effort. They see the strict rules and regulations as a sign that the government cares for everyone, not as something to be resisted or rebelled against.

We hear that in some countries and cultures, people are taking the threat of COVID-19 less seriously. This reminds me of when I lived in London during the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 1980s and '90s. Back in those days, at least to begin with, many people thought it was something that affected “others” (i.e. gays, Africans, drug addicts). Until it started affecting people closer to home. Then the penny dropped. On social media a few weeks ago, there seemed to be a similar mindset towards COVID-19: “It only affects the elderly and people with underlying health conditions”; “I am young and healthy. It won't get to me” etc. I have a feeling that the tide is now turning, and more and more people are realising that COVID-19 is a thing which affects each and every one of us.

I mentioned my husband, Jose, at the beginning of this piece. He has given me permission to share the following observations.

Jose is a mental health specialist working in Barcelona. He sees patients with serious conditions such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. He loves his patients, and normally sees them face to face each day. As with all of his colleagues, Jose has been told to work from home, and now calls his patients by phone. At first he was worried that his patients would suffer increased anxiety levels brought on by the lockdown. To his delight, he is finding that this is not the case. Although not ideal, it seems that two thirty-minute phone calls per week are more than compensating for one ninety-minute face-to-face appointment. Jose and his colleagues are considering incorporating telephone support for patients as part of their routine once “normal service has been resumed”.

There will no doubt be plenty of insights to be learnt and shared by many people who now find themselves working from home. The technology is there, and is constantly evolving and improving. Perhaps my wish to reduce my carbon footprint will be granted. You never know.

Whilst I am reflecting here on my balcony, I am sad to learn that, day by day, the number of infected people here in Spain is still going up – as are the fatalities. They say things will continue to get worse before they get better. Just as in the UK, frontline staff don't have the right personal protection equipment (PPE), and we see each evening on the news stories about doctors, nurses and carers who are battling valiantly to help an ever-increasing number of sick and desperate patients. It is heartbreaking.

Yet in amongst the upsetting news, there are stories which help lift our spirits. The famous Spanish department store, El Corte Inglés (situated in cities right across Spain) are donating their stock of sheets and bedding to nearby hospitals. Likewise, IKEA have just announced that they are giving mattresses and bedding to old people's homes. There have been some generous financial donations from big football clubs (e.g. Real Madrid) and even from a couple of banks. Long may this continue. One of the most heart-warming images from TV news was that of a

convent of nuns sitting around a huge refectory table, sewing hundreds of protective face masks to be given to a local hospital.

Although times of difficulty can often bring out the worst in people, they can also bring out the best. My feeling right now that “best” is winning.

So to finish, I would like to share a real “view from a Spanish balcony” – our balcony, in fact.

Each evening at 8 pm, all across Spain, people stand on their balconies and applaud non-stop for around five minutes. This is our way to thank, each and every day, frontline medical staff and caregivers for the extraordinary work they are doing. It is a simple gesture, yet a powerfully moving one. For a few minutes at the end of the day, we stand on our balcony, in amongst our potted plants, clapping like crazy, and looking at the other quarantined people standing and clapping on their balconies. We feel a sense of connection with one another. Before this all happened, most of us did not know each other – the “busy-ness” of life kept us all apart. Now, with our shared experience of COVID-19 quarantine, perhaps we all feel just a little closer.

A few balconies down from our apartment, an elderly lady comes out, on her own, to applaud. Her hair is always well coiffed, and she wears an elegant pink dressing gown. She smiles at her neighbours, and waves goodnight to everyone once the clapping has died down, then she goes back inside. I can't help but wonder if this five minutes of communal clapping each evening is the time she most looks forward to – when she sees other people, connects with her neighbours and feels part of her community once again. I might be completely wrong, of course, but whether it is the case or not, I have made a promise to myself – that once this episode is over, no matter how busy things get again, I will ensure that I take the time to greet, with a smile and a wave, the lady in the pink dressing gown.

Maybe I can run some errands for her when I am doing my “mindful shopping”? Just a thought.

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## **This too will pass**

**Robin Ancrum**

*United Kingdom*

It was the summer of 2010 and I had finally got my life sorted. The dog was, admittedly, dead, but the kids had gone – the boy on a postgraduate gap year in Canada and the girl doing a business degree in Cardiff. I was in a job I loved, with people I liked in a big company with an innovative business model and great ethics.

Financially, things were looking rosy. With a generous package, pension, car allowance, bells and whistles I could – for the first time in my life – relax about the bills, not live in fear of the central heating boiler breaking down and contemplate good times ahead. My wife would shortly be able to give up her work and spend time doing the things she really wanted to do. What could possibly go wrong?

Our company was a relatively late victim of the global financial crash – we thought we had weathered the storm, but following another big failure in our sector, the banks pulled the plug

and we went into receivership. Along with several thousand colleagues, I was made redundant. It was November. I've always hated No-bloody-vember!

I quickly discovered that intellectually knowing the Kübler-Ross curve is very different to living it. I rattled around various stages of loss like a pinball. It's not a straight-line experience; foolish denial is tinged with clinging hope, the anger has more than a touch of self-pity, one goes through the practical penances in a state of suspended shock – returning the car you can no longer afford, cutting the non-essential subscriptions and standing orders, renegotiating rates with uncaring suppliers, signing on at the Benefits Office. All the time knowing that these steps are ordinary, unremarkable, trivial in the great scale of things. And yet, each new micro-loss feels like a blow to self-esteem, to identity, to ego – and so the descent into depression was for me gradual, almost unnoticed.

Troubles don't come singly. My broadband connection went down and it took six weeks to get back online – just when networking and job-hunting (dreary and soul-destroying rejection-fest though it was) seemed like a priority. This was a personal attack from a hostile, fibre-optic universe. In fact, looking back I am struck by how silly, petty and self-centred my reactions were.

What did I learn?

To be grateful for the relatives and a few true friends who gave me practical help and support until I got back on my feet.

To be tolerant of the people who were only doing their job – not deliberately demeaning me. Like the lady at the employment exchange who did her best each fortnight as we ploughed through the list of hopelessly inappropriate vacant situations.

To be more thankful for the blessings I have and less bitter about the trappings I've lost.

What don't kill you makes you stronger. I'm hoping the lessons learned will be useful in this new decade with a very different and much more serious global shock affecting us all. When I got my first pay cheque after getting back to work in 2011, I bought a bunch of flowers for the long-suffering lady in the job exchange. She seemed genuinely amazed.

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## **Always look on the bright side...**

**Beverley McMaster**

*London, UK*

Let me start by acknowledging I have much to be grateful for! Despite this, when I learned that schools were going to be shut the sense of heavy greyness was palpable. This was going to mean noise, mess, interruption. And the constant battle, oh this was the biggest, with getting them off their screens. How was I going to cope with that one?!

I'm an introvert. I need space to reflect and process. My work brings me into deep connection with people. It's one of the many things I am grateful for. However, I've learnt that what sustains me – my energy and what I put into the world – is time away from work. Quiet, peaceful time, pocketed during school hours, at home, when I'm not working directly with people.

And now this was about to be turned upside down. Don't get me wrong, I can do disruption and even chaos and high energy, just not all of the time. And, heavens above, it wasn't going to be just for a few weeks! I could see this stretching on until September, without even a whiff of a summer holiday to provide some light relief.

Alongside my heaviness was guilt. Why wasn't I embracing this like a 'normal' parent would? Was I the only one who wasn't looking forward to schools being closed? So many other parents seemed to be calling out for it. Another self-inflicted judgement pin-prick in how I 'am'.

After a few head in the hands moments, I got with the plot. One of my learnings in the last ten years, and now it's pretty much a default, is that in times of adversity I ask myself, 'What do I need? What do I know? What resources do I have?' By Friday I was working it out. What did I need to put in place so that I could play my part?

I knew I was going to miss quiet time. I have regular yoga practice but was struggling to find a regular meditation time, something I'd wanted for a while. So it doesn't take a rocket scientist to work this one out, does it?

Each morning I get up before the rest of my family, I creep down to my living room and sit. This week I've been blessed with the warmth of the glorious sun on my face. I spend 10-15 minutes practising Reiki, I follow a guided meditation (Insight Timer, David J) and then I practice yoga. This week I've found that I don't need to follow a YouTube video. I'm really savouring the peace and quiet, such that I don't actually want the voice of a yoga teacher (however much I love Yoga with Adriene, or SarahBeth Yoga) in my living room, in this little cocoon of quiet time.

Family routine begins at about 9 am. Like many other households, we have followed the school routine, putting some structure into the day. There's some flexing: sometimes the girls have free time during the school hours and I'm letting go of the screen battle. It's what it is. We have lunch as a family – might be a bit haphazard, but we sit down and take a bit of time to come together. We eat our evening meal together, the regularity of it for a week day is unusual. The permitted exercise happens at some point late afternoon for those who want it.

There has been other re-learning this week – my assessment of noise and the disruption was just that. I was experiencing this as if it was going to be true. The reality is far from it. A week on, there is the gentle noise of the girls face-timing with friends as they get on with school work, the quiet hum of the radio downstairs, and the sound of me typing. And birdsong. In this little haven, we are learning to be peaceful and relish this time together as a family. I'm sure that when the girls are grown we will look back on COVID-19 with some disbelief and fondness. Oh, and thank goodness for social media – some of the memes and jokes have been hilarious!

So... What do *you* need? What do *you* know? What resources do *you* have? Observe and quit the assessment, and above all, find the laughter.

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## Shopping

Trevor Hoyle

*United Kingdom*

The weekend just gone, we were going to town so I accompanied my wife to the supermarket (and I don't usually do the supermarket shop). We arrived, it wasn't too bad, we walked up and down the aisles. Obviously, quite a few shelves were empty, no toilet roll, no pasta, no rice or baked beans. There was a big long queue at back of the store. I said to my wife, 'The fish counter's busy', and we wandered over only to discover it was the queue for the checkout. It wound right around the store to the back wall. At this point, I suggested that I stand in the queue while she shops and brings stuff to me.

We are now in a queue when we're supposed to be two metres from anyone else but it's not possible. Fifty minutes later we paid and walked out.

The few things you normally consider essentials weren't available. They had bread and vegetables, etc. But dried food, tins and toilet rolls were absent. Two things then came to mind:

1. I wondered why everyone was buying pasta, baked beans and loo rolls. I had a quick flick through Joe Wicks' recipe book and couldn't find one recipe that contained all three ingredients. The irrational behaviour of people when what you really need is fruit and veg.
2. Living in the country you tend to observe things. On my morning run, which I am grateful I can still do despite the lockdown, I noticed roadkill. There were several pheasants and rabbits lying by the roadside which had obviously been struck by cars. We love the local wildlife and feed the pheasants at home from the kitchen window but the thought came that if this supermarket thing persists and people continue to behave so irrationally, should I pick up roadkill to take home?

In all the craziness, you have to think about impact and behaviours. Apply things from a work perspective to a personal perspective. Firstly, show awareness of yourselves and others; think about how you impact on others. Don't buy all of the toilet roll if it is not needed, don't clear the shelves of things you don't want or need.

I think that there are three categories in life:

1. Things I can influence – I will try to effect change through the relevant people or authorities
2. Things I can control – I will take ownership
3. Things I can neither control nor influence – I will try to let them go

I believe that this helps mental wellbeing. I don't spend time stressing about things that I cannot impact upon. What is going on at the moment is so unprecedented, nobody knows where it is going – it is clearly going to evolve and unravel. You have to continue to be aware and adapt your own behaviour, try to influence the behaviour of others to behave rationally. Keep calm, controlled and rational. Ensure you act with integrity and empathy for others. Don't do something today that you will look back and regret tomorrow or next week – you cleared

the shelves of toilet roll and wonder why you can't get food in the cupboards when they are full.

You might not be able to control it but be aware, monitor news, see how it is evolving, consider how you need to adapt actions. I will continue to run and, if desperate, I will collect roadkill! Hopefully, it won't come to that if everybody stays calm, behaves rationally, thinks about the part they play and how they impact on others. We will all get through it and we will come out of the other side. We will look back on this and tell our grandchildren in years to come.

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## **Wearing a mask can be cool**

**Joy Chen**

*16-year-old from Shanghai, China*

Now more than two months later, I still cannot believe what happened on the rainy night of January 23rd, two days before Chinese New Year. I still cannot believe I went to the last show of Notre-Dame de Paris musical before theatres and cinemas got all closed. Above all, I still marvel at my wonderful experience of spiritual connection during this tragic time, the scenes I saw and the words I heard that I would never forget.

That day Wuhan went into lockdown. Everyone in China was in shock and within seconds the news was all over the internet. The roads were suddenly empty and everyone started wearing a mask. I have been waiting for the Notre-Dame de Paris musical for ages hoping to see the best of all times. I had the best possible ticket but I started to wonder if it was worth going. It wasn't my first time watching it, nor my second, it would, in fact, be my third time watching it in the theatre. I have also watched the DVD countless times. You might say I'm crazy, but let me answer with a line in one of the songs. "*Vivre pour celui qu'on aime. Living for the one we love.*"

It was in this spirit of passion, I went on my journey to the theatre wearing an N95 mask for self-protection. Some spectacular scenes unfolded in front of me one after another.

### **Underground**

Nearly two-thirds of the seats were empty at 6 (this is Shanghai! You need to imagine the usual crowdedness during rush hour in a city of 35 million people.) In my cabin, every single person was wearing a mask of some kind and it was deadly silent, as if it was doomsday. However, despite the scariness it aroused in me, it amazed me also how quickly people responded to the call of self-protection and social responsibility.

### **At the gate of the theatre**

Temperature check procedure was newly deployed at every entrance. People waited anxiously but cooperatively in line, some took the time to calm themselves down after running in the rain, panting behind their masks.

## Inside

People were trying to spread out. I could not help noticing the types and colours of masks. In the theatre of around 2,000 seats, I was visiting a mask exhibition. One ticket, double shows! What would it look like from the stage? Would the actors and actresses be distracted? It must be a once-in-a-lifetime experience for them also.

It turned out, I was worrying too much. The show was just as amazing as usual - actually, even better than the previous ones I watched, probably because we all wanted to save the best for the last. The masks did not seem to block the interaction from the audience. After all, our passion could still be radiated from our eye contact and voices, even though we were sometimes completely out of tune. Blame the mask! Let me tell you the true downside of watching the two-hour musical with an N95 mask on all the time is the pain. But safety goes before comfort.

## Curtain call

Amongst the enthusiastic audiences gathered around the stage, the lead actor, Gringoire, gave a speech. Apparently, it was not something he'd prepared and rehearsed for. Its authenticity struck us, and I would never forget what he said. "Everybody on the stage noticed that the vast majority of you are wearing masks tonight. I would like to thank you all for this smart and respectful behaviour. Thank you so much. We all know how you are facing a major public health challenge and we trust you together will solve this by acting as responsible citizens. Thank you very much." It was caring and understanding and so nicely conveyed despite the language barriers between people from different continents.

We took a giant group photo that night. We were smiling under the masks despite knowing that it would not be seen at all. I believed we all smiled to ourselves with a feeling of pride and connectedness. Music had cured our anxiety and connected us spiritually. I was lost in the vast sea of compassion, unidentifiable in the photo. But to me, it was the most special picture I could ever have.

We sang the song "Le Temp des Cathédrales". We were a bit off the tune with masks on, but the song touched me more than any time before. There was a line in the English version of the song, "From nowhere came the age of the cathedrals," that struck me suddenly. Isn't it also the age of the cathedrals these days in a way? Uncertain, chaotic and unpredictable. It came from nowhere, no one could ever imagine it happening and we could not believe it is coming. It is a very challenging time. But it is in this very moment that we see the most beautiful part of humanity, such as this magnificent scene right in front of me. The beginning of 2020 is deemed a special memory, as the song goes: "live in glass and live in stone". "In two thousand this will end," the song suggests. Yes, sooner or later this will come to an end and we should remain hopeful.

In the future, history books will state: "The virus was eventually killed and the spirit of compassion and connection survived."



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## An Italian perspective

Elena Mauro

*Milan, Italy*

Feeling uncertain and overwhelmed? While we may be isolated physically, we are not alone, and this book offers insights, comfort and hope.

I am Italian; I live by myself in an apartment in Milan (red zone), and since 8 March I have been experiencing #IStayHome. This will continue until at least 15 April.

During the first few days we were allowed to walk in the open air keeping a safe distance of a couple of metres from others and I found it very interesting how COVID-19 was creating solidarity: the people around were all smiling and even waving to each other while walking. People who did not know each other were showing an openness I had never seen before.

I also observed a growing kindness and compassion in the building I live in: many were asking after older people, whether they were in need of food or medicines; some bought extra gloves and sanitising gel to be shared. I have to say that those attitudes and behaviours helped a lot in making me feel I was not alone.

When the total lockdown started due to the spread of the virus, I started to think of the friends I have around the western world. I called them to share my experience and I noticed they were not ready to think of an immediate total lockdown as the best solution. It showed me that when faced with something unpalatable, we do not want to listen to someone with more experience, and what really struck me was that both fear and hope could produce the same result!

The days since the lockdown have been marked by the pursuit of a “new normal”, adjusting to working from home and reorganising my time and needs while complying with the updated government rules. It has been a valuable time of reflection and I would like to share the following insights with you:

- Uncertainty is part of our reality; every day we deal with it even if we are not aware of it. We often struggle with uncertainty and chase after certainty, and that is not beneficial in my experience: it requires a lot of energy and leaves you feeling drained.
- Adaptability is the best approach to uncertainty: think of it, the history of humanity has shown through the ages that we are very capable of adapting. In my experience we are perfectly able to adjust to the lockdown.
- Focus on the fact that the lockdown is for a limited time: when we do not like something our mind tends to focus on it, losing the big picture and draining our energy.
- Ask yourself, “What can I learn from the lockdown experience?”; valuable answers can emerge regarding your self-awareness, relationships, behaviours, beliefs... and in my experience, new ways of thinking emerge as well!
- To make wise decisions, think not only of yourself and your family, but of the community as well: if I focus on my own desire for freedom, I might think I can go out as

I do not have COVID-19 symptoms, but what about the safety of my eighty-five-year-old mother? And what about the danger I pose to the community?

- Think of the wider picture: the meaning of the lockdown is not to follow rules, it is to take responsibility as an individual who is part of a community. A friend of mine is a doctor and during these gruelling days at the hospital he has to choose to whom he can give ventilation helmets as there are not enough of them to go round; how many more times will doctors have to make such decisions because you are not respecting the lockdown rules?
- Be creative: many say that as human beings we need disruption to generate innovation. The lockdown is a great opportunity to change our habits, to reflect, and to create a “new normal”; to experiment with new ways of working and communicating. The important thing is to stay focused on the value we are creating, not on what we are missing. In Italy we have web happy hours and parties, we play music and sing from our balconies, we webcook with friends, we read books and poems.
- Reconnect with Kairos (qualitative time): ancient Greeks distinguished Kairos from Chronos (quantitative time, the one of our clocks). Lockdown is such an opportunity to live time in a very different way: you do not have to rush out, stress yourself for being late, rush to pick up your child from kindergarten, plan your day to fit in the gym and buy food. During the lockdown you can slow down and ask yourself which are the things that really matter.
- Focus on love versus fear: oriental philosophy says the two opposite forces in the universe are love and fear; the more you focus on love, the more light you can see and you can help others to see. Love makes you stronger and full of trust; fear weakens you, drains energy and makes you think only of your survival needs. When we focus on fear we run to the supermarket and buy lots of food and water; we do not want to give two packets of pasta to an old woman when in our shopping trolley we have twenty.
- Smile: a smile costs nothing and makes a real difference, even to ourselves. In fact when we smile we produce anti-stress hormones that reinforce our immune system: it might even help you resist COVID-19!

# PART 8

## #LetsResetNormal

Much has already been written in the media about how society might change due to this corona virus pandemic. In each country these differences will reflect the unique blend of political, social, technological and economic factors that drive that society. They are all hypothetical, some seem reasonable, some outlandish. The truth will only be known when we come out of lockdown globally, not when individual countries emerge. We are too connected. What is clear is the hum of change – the desire for a reset in direction.

Environmental issues are surfacing with the skies being cleared of aircraft and commuters staying at home.

Political issues are surfacing as we look more critically at our domestic supply chains and infrastructure.

Technology has had a leading role to play in connecting people via video conferencing and text-based communication in the absence of physical deliveries.

Society is set to change in fundamental ways in respect of relationships, community, work, and more.

How, we cannot truly know until things play out – or we collectively make different choices that cause change. We have seen many changes in ‘normal’ – we recycle almost without thinking now, we wear seatbelts, we hardly smoke in public. The list is endless if we care to look at the incremental changes over decades. But this really does seem to be an opportunity to make more drastic changes in a drastically shorter timescale. Who will lead these changes? It could be you.

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### Embracing risk and uncertainty

Caspar Berry

*Speaker, trainer, and former professional poker player*

“It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future”

- Yogi Berra

There is no one future. It is not out there waiting to be predicted by an expert's best guess. Human beings simply cannot control everything. And for this reason, the future will *always* be uncertain.

Very few of us like this idea. There's a part of our brain that genuinely needs certainty and control. The first pieces of writing on clay tablets in Babylon 6,000 years ago were laws – to bring safety and certainty by controlling people's behaviour – and laws are still the basis of a civilised society today. And at the heart of much of the personal development literature around is the mantra “focus on what we can control”.

Despite this, cars still crash, people fall over, businesses collapse, wars are lost and – against all odds – every day, people die. Within this daily maelstrom of uncertainty we have to make hundreds of decisions every day, a tapestry of decisions to select our food, our outfit, our meetings, our evening’s entertainment, our hobbies, our life-partners and ultimately the quality and conditions of our lives.

The definition of a decision, according to Harvard Business School, is: “The allocation or commitment of resources under conditions of uncertainty.” That’s what it is to be human. We’re all decision-making machines made flesh. We don’t think of our lives in this way, but at a fundamental level this is what we’re doing and who we are.

As a professional poker player I have to make one of these decisions – a resource allocation under a condition of uncertainty – every 90 seconds or so, with the intention of maximising my return on that investment. Check, fold, call, raise. I make the best decision I can with the always-limited information that I have available. Ultimately, though, the outcome of each decision is mostly out of my control.

I’ve played poker professionally since 2000, starting as a professional in Las Vegas before going on to become a TV commentator during the poker boom of 2005–10, and the poker adviser on the James Bond movie *Casino Royale*. But neither I nor the world’s greatest ever players can guarantee we’re going to win *any* individual hand. If my opponent makes four aces, or if I miss my flush draw, I’m going to lose.

That makes poker an interesting model against which to explore the uncertainty of life. Don’t get me wrong, it’s not the same as life: poker is just a game. One of the many ways poker differs from life is that whereas we can make a guess as to what the future holds in life based on our experience or expertise (or what Jean from Facebook posted this morning), none of these things means anything in a poker game, where the next card could be the ace of diamonds or the four of spades and there’s nothing at all I can do to predict or control it.

This makes poker obviously, overtly and undeniably uncertain – ostensibly very different to life. Yet they’re actually much more similar than we might first believe.

The definitive study on uncertainty in life and our ability to overcome or predict it was conducted by Philip Tetlock in 1984, a young academic at the National Research Council. He asked 284 world experts for their judgements as to what the future held.

For twenty years, he asked each expert for their pick of three possible outcomes in social-political and economic issues. They had to make their pick and accompany their guess with a probability that measured their confidence in their judgement from 1 to 100% certainty. In total he asked a whopping 27,450 questions during that period and then spent another five years writing up his work.

His primary finding? Taken as a whole, those 284 world leaders in their field were *no better than average*. You would have got the same statistical result from an eight-year-old child or from throwing darts at a dart board. There is no one future. It’s not out there waiting to be discovered by an expert’s best guess.

But, more interestingly, Tetlock found that within his collective failure, some people were definitely better predictors of the future than others. Why? The single strongest correlation he could find was between their success and the confidence they had in their guess as expressed by the probability they ascribed between 1% and 100%. And the correlation was negative. That is, the less confident they were, the more correct their predictions on the whole.

It wasn't that those who were less confident felt less sure in themselves, rather that they had a greater appreciation of the complexity of predicting the future. They realised how difficult it actually was and therefore took more time to try to be accurate. They appreciated that life is more like a game of poker and much, much less inevitable than some so-called experts would have us believe. And because of this appreciation they were less dogmatic and more open-minded, more willing to upgrade their prediction when new information became available... and less inclined to believe Jean on Facebook.

The lesson? There is no single future. It's not out there waiting to be predicted by experts. It is continually shifting sand in which anything is possible. Trump is not definitely going to get re-elected any more than he was definitely not going to be elected in the first place. Brexit isn't definitely going to happen any more than it definitely wasn't going to happen in the first place.

Hopefully one of the positive legacies of the coronavirus will be to remind people there is no one future; that anything can happen – although that doesn't mean that unlikely events are suddenly as possible as normal ones. The more we see the future as a series of different possible outcomes – like the ace of clubs or the five of spades – the better the judgements and decisions we will make as a result.

There is no one future, but that's fine.

Embrace the uncertainty, it's liberating.

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## **Our future is what we make of it**

**David Norrington**

*Publisher, Cardiff, UK*

Like many business owners across the world, my story is unremarkable. I run a publishing company, the one publishing this book. It's just me and my current intern, Sam, in the office, although not in the same office. I've worked from home for years, but for Sam the transition to working remotely is a new experience. Over the past three weeks we've been steadily developing systems and means of communication that are facilitating working together. A month ago it would have been a different story, and I'd have had to let him go – we would have struggled to be productive. With Zoom, Facebook Messenger, and Google Docs we are able to communicate and collaborate.

This book is quick and dirty publishing. Shortcuts taken and compromises on our normal quality threshold in the interest of speed. No, the articles haven't had the care and attention we'd have liked, but they have been looked at by at least two people, even if that's been at speed. No, we haven't had revision rounds with the authors – they submitted their article and left us to clean it up as we saw fit. Definitely not the way we work normally, as our existing authors might wearily attest to when they receive yet another round of queries to answer.

The normal 'rules' of publishing have been set aside in extraordinary times. I wouldn't want this to become the new normal that is being spoken of so much. It's not the case that everything we are having to do differently is better and should become part of our process when we come out the other side.

But some things will stick.

The collaboration between editorial professionals who have answered the call. I don't like asking people to do things for free, but they stepped up and helped at a time when I honestly couldn't cope alone.

Business is going to be difficult. The business is owed money that we might not see and we still have bills to pay for software we aren't using. Last week (was it really only last week?) I had to make the decision to suspend publications for ten weeks, and now I think it might be considerably longer. And I had to tell authors that their books wouldn't come out, and I couldn't tell them when they would be released. On Monday morning I told them I wouldn't be able to work on books much because of commitments at home. That same afternoon, this project to publish a book at lightning speed was up and running, and I had to let them know that this was my way of helping in a crisis.

Will my business survive? I don't appear to be eligible for grants, and things are tight. One thing I can say, even if publishing this book is the last breath of Wordcatcher Publishing, at least I'm going to go out with a bang. I'll get a job delivering food or medicine, or whatever it takes to get through the crisis and, when the dust settles (if it ever *settles*), I'll pick myself up and find something more permanent. I've worked in a variety of business sectors: retail, business-to-business sales, sports coaching and development, web design, education, travel, photography, and probably some I've forgotten to mention. But that's been a reality for many people for decades: we need to be agile, and if that means reinventing ourselves and rising to a new challenge, in an unfamiliar sector, then so be it.

We will all have personal choices to make when we return to work. And we will return to work. I think many people will be able to return to the jobs they lost, and there will be a recovery. Not easy, not simple, but it will come. But I think the difference for many people this time around will be an opportunity to make changes and perhaps *choose* not to go back to what they did before. Perhaps from necessity – if our old job doesn't exist, or we didn't like the way we were treated. Perhaps from choice – a conscious decision to forge a new path with new skills and resilience born from our current experience.

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## 15 Positives

Kevin McAlpin

*Essex, United Kingdom*

People are feeling overwhelmed and uncertain and that is natural. The key is to have hope and see what things may be like in the future. We cannot make decisions for the future unless we have taken the time to think what the new future may look like.

How may COVID-19 change society and organisations in the future? Well, we don't know, but there will be changes and many will be positive.

I have been reflecting on benefits which may come from this.

1. With people staying in their homes for weeks or even months there will be an increased appreciation of the outdoors and the simple things in life.

2. There will be an impact on how and *if* we work and travel. 'Is there any reason for us to hold this meeting face to face?' will become a standard question for businesses and individuals. Perhaps collaborative technology will become the new normal.
3. There has been a greater appreciation of those on the front line - doctors, nurses and key workers putting their lives at risk. This gratitude and appreciation will continue and perhaps lead to increased investment in health services.
4. Extreme politics and polarisation will potentially come back into more balanced views and constructive ways forward.
5. We will have time to stop and consider what's important - who we are and what we stand for, our purpose in life, and many people will make profound changes and take action.
6. An increase in empathy, giving and support. Communities, families and friends are connecting and reconnecting, mutual aid groups are springing up everywhere. This will help with a reconnection to people rather than the individualistic society that has been growing.
7. In just a few weeks we have seen the benefit to the planet - Venice's canals turning blue, dolphins swimming in estuaries and China seeing the stars in their skies. The focus on purposeful organisations and sustainability will increase.
8. Organisations will become simpler. Processes, regulations and systems have adapted and increased creativity and collaboration.
9. Collective intelligence and diversity of thinking has been harnessed to solve some very complex problems at speed and these approaches and skills will continue and evolve.
10. A healthier approach to technology and our digital lifestyle with people disconnecting and realising the importance of balance and what is important to them in life.
11. Big Data and science decision-making and the truthful conversations will increase in the political arena as this expectation has now been set.
12. Increased levels of trust in people, society, institutions and *perhaps* even politicians.
13. A better understanding of human needs and how to thrive during uncertainty and change.
14. Increased collaboration between the corporate world, government and not-for-profit organisations.
15. Finally, perhaps a more positive society and culture. People are realising if they consume negativity in the media and in their thoughts and conversations it only drives threat and fear; focus on positivity to drive a culture of happiness.

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## A Final Word – Let’s Reset Normal

Kevin McAlpin

We resisted trying to summarise over 40,000 words of personal stories, reflections, advice and human empathy, but we didn’t want to leave you hanging. It doesn’t really matter whether you’ve worked through these wonderful articles in order, or jumped around as the titles grabbed you. What matters is what connects them all.

These stories – some of them deeply personal – are connected by the fact that each one was given willingly and freely in the simple hope that it might help another person. Spanning race, culture, age, gender, sexual preference and a host of other human characteristics, there is a diversity here that holds a mirror up to our differences. As ever, these differences are our strength, and they will help us to survive and thrive in these very difficult times.

Nothing of what we’ve shared here was intended to play down the severity of what we face, or the sadness many are enduring. We merely hope that something in this collection is useful, gives you some practical ideas and – ideally – a little lift for your spirits. Even though many of us are isolated, and may not be with the people we would normally share our lives with, we are not *alone*. In shaping this project, we were overwhelmed by the speed and intensity of the response to our initial requests for articles, as well as the honesty they contained. Our heartfelt thanks go to all the contributors, the editors and everyone who brought this to life in a little over a week.

What you take away from this collection is personal to you, and what is crucial is that you find some words here to use as hope, inspiration and the individual motivation to shape a positive future. If this project taught me anything, it was to ask for help from others and to believe that – even under the toughest of challenges – it would be forthcoming. So, together, Let’s Reset Normal and make sure the connections we have made and differences we have seen stick, for you, your loved ones, your colleagues, your communities, your organisations and our planet.