



## COVID-19 COMMENTARY: THOUGHTS ON WHAT WE ARE DEALING WITH...

A consultant analyzes pandemic planning, from sales to safety in a world where 'optimism and denial are cousins'

By Bruce Hodes

**W**hat follows is my latest thinking on what we are dealing with.

Blue sky. ... I am standing in the sun's warmth on a grassy bank with a steep decline overlooking a meandering river. A winter chill is present. I am thinking business is good and 2020 is shaping up to be a great year. ... I hear something about a really bad storm in Wuhan ... never heard of that place .... good luck to them.

My eyes fly open—confusion, fear! I suddenly realize I am standing up to my neck in frigid cold water...what happened?

How did it happen? It is twilight and I cannot see clearly...freezing and shivering. I see my grandchildren and family a ways away. Attempt to move toward them. "Stay away!!!" they scream. I am frozen. It is now dark. ...

I awake from a dream; I am still up to my neck in frigid water. Light is better. I see many people scattered around within 25 feet and beyond. They are also up to their necks in frigid water. There is no solid land in sight. I can move some, wiggling is okay, and take a step occasionally. I have managed to get a mask. ... I mean wetsuit and that makes the frigidity of the water, while uncomfortable, tolerable. ... Whenever I move toward someone they scream "Stay away!"

The scenario outlined above represents a creative interpretation of where I/we have been in this pandemic and where we are now. ... This is a new phase. We'll be here for a time. I continue to be involved with many clients and businesses. What follows are some thoughts about what's going on, what happens next, and how

you can respond to the challenges we're all facing.

1. A lot of us were frozen in the first full month of the pandemic, April. How to manage everyone with work from home, lockdown for all, and the Payroll Protection Plan (PPP) were the main concerns of many CEOs and businesses.
2. Many business leaders have gotten present to the new business circumstance and realities and have engaged in laying new track in this new abnormal world. They are now proactively dealing with their challenges, rather than just reacting. How do I sell virtually, how do I have a safe workplace, and what does my revenue look like are the present issues.
3. There is now a wiggling going on in the business community. I am getting calls from Leadership Teams to facilitate planning sessions. Many aspects of the 2019 plan are now irrelevant. There is a Second Quarter though and beyond. ... Leadership Teams are feeling that they've got to get focused and have priorities beyond the daily firefighting. There now needs to be a future to live into.
4. Employee health and safety from COVID-19 is a concern. Working from home is one thing. However, being in the office will become possible. Commercial laundries continue to operate; much of manufacturing goes on. Questions include:
  - How do I run a safe, healthy facility?
  - What is my protocol when someone gets COVID-19 or comes from a household with COVID-19?
  - What is a deep cleaning anyway?
  - How many times a day do we clean?
  - Temperature checks anyone?

- How are we ensuring social distancing?
- What's the lunchroom and bathroom protocol?

We have one company that has 800 employees. They bought a \$40,000 machine in which all employees walk under on their way to work. Green light—normal temperature, Red light—fever and you are not allowed into the building. Another company has a \$30,000 ultraviolet machine that lets them sanitize their trucks and offices; training is required for safe use. This is a new day. I predict that this kind of machine and other protocols will be common in workplaces, airports and wherever we congregate indoors.

5. Companies and sales forces are confronting “How do I sell in this environment?” Salespeople want face-to-face meetings. We say to prospects, “Let me come over.” They say, “No way Jose,” you say, “Do you Zoom?” They may say “What’s a Zoom?” or “Not today” or “I am Zoomed out.” Now what? One sales force we know of is having “Lunch and Learns” and will buy you lunch if you attend (online). It’s a win. They’re doing four sessions a week. What kind of video greeting and touch base video could sales departments produce that could make a difference? One of our industrial launderers is doing this.

What about new products? For example, clients need masks and face shields. ... Could I provide them? Again, several of our uniform laundry clients are considering this. Touchless dispensers anyone?

Should I offer to buy Zoom and cameras and mics for my clients and prospects who do not have them? Some industries are doing well. Some markets are expanding; which ones? How do I find these new markets? What research should I do? Do I need to pivot and, if so, how? One client pivoted and bought face masks in China and sent a lot of money to China. Six weeks later they have not yet gotten the face masks out of China.


There are risks. ... Should I redeploy my salespeople so that they are involved in collecting payments and reaching customers that they know? These are the kinds of issues sales teams are now focused on.

6. Some workplaces are really struggling with stay at home and knowing what is getting done. It is predictable that COVID-19 will come to someone in your admin offices. You need to be prepared for this. Some managers struggle with communicating and getting follow through from employees. Other companies are excelling at working at home and being productive. Working at home is not going away. I predict work from out of the office will actually grow. How do you and your company get better at it? What tools do you need to use to enhance productivity? One answer that I am hearing repeatedly is communication. ... Then how are you going to enhance virtual communication in your organization and from six feet with masks on? ...
7. In many organizations, the meeting structure has collapsed. Firefighting is the order of the day. With this new phase, it is time to bring regular meetings back. The meeting structure probably needs to be enhanced and strengthened. It just takes longer to get things done...that is certainly my experience. More communication is needed—via Zoom and the like—the question is how should we enhance our communication?
8. There is hiring going on. Some of our clients are quite excited that the job marketplace has changed dramatically. It has gone from being very hard to hire talent to having a lot more people looking for work. Jobs that went vacant before the pandemic are now filled with real talent. CEOs are facing the fact that some of their employees are no longer productive or valuable, given the new environment. They are looking for more talented and nimble

leaders. There is now real hiring going on with frontline workers.

9. The PPP will expire for most sometime during 2020. For many who got the money that’s a line in the sand. That is the time that they want to make sure that they’re moving forward into this new world.
10. Optimism and denial are cousins. ... I want to be hopeful and at the same time not deny the situation and the challenges businesses are facing. There are so many shrill voices: OPEN UP, STAY CLOSED, WEAR A MASK, DON’T WEAR A MASK, IT’S CHINA’S FAULT, THE ECONOMY IS IMPLODING, RECOVERY WILL BE V SHAPED, U SHAPED, IT’S A CONSPIRACY, NO IT’S A SERIOUS MEDICAL EMERGENCY... all voices seemingly plausible and reasonable. ... OMG, who do I listen to? ...Change and uncertainty—that’s the new normal.
11. I’ve been doing Zoom calls with business leaders since the beginning. At first, I was showing up dressed casually and saying that is generous. I now am always coming to these calls dressed in business casual—at least the top of me is. I am drinking a lot less. We are in a new phase and taking steps forward.

We’re opening up at different speeds in different regions. The next few weeks will give us insights on the next phase of the pandemic and the new reality. These are some of the things that I hear and I am dealing with. How about you? I look forward to hearing about your adventures and insights in these abnormal times. Keep causing and creating! **TS**

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