

Is There a Silver Lining to the Coronavirus Pandemic?

by Jeffrey Leventry

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I was intrigued by a recent article in the Philadelphia Inquirer about a 14 year-old middle school student who is manufacturing face shields for local hospitals to help protect some of our heroes – medical professionals. He borrowed 3 of his school’s 3D printers, found a design for face shields on the internet, obtained the raw materials with the help of his parents, and set up a “little factory” in his basement that operates 24/7. To date, he has produced and disseminated 100 shields to 3 local hospitals. He has plans to produce 1000 shields to support the heroic efforts of those who staff Philadelphia area hospitals.

This young man is not alone in going “above and beyond” to help support our country’s war against COVID-19. Similar to what our citizens did to ramp up production during WW II, all of us are being asked to do our part to prevent the spread of the virus, and volunteer our talents to combat our latest public enemy. What is required is a true Team effort!

It is clear to me that no one has been spared the far-reaching impact of this pandemic. Many Americans have lost loved ones and were refused the opportunity to plan a memorial service to honor the memory of those they cherished. Still others have lost their jobs, been denied medical benefits or have suffered a significant decline in their retirement investment portfolio. The emotional toll of this pandemic is hard to estimate, but it has been immense for all of us who hope and pray for better days in the weeks and months to come.

However, I believe there is a “silver lining” in this daunting experience that has quickly materialized. Many of us have noticed that this difficult time has brought out the best in human behavior, in ways that were unimaginable a mere month ago.

New Behaviors / Change in Behaviors

Among other things, my wife, daughter and I have noticed that people seem to be exhibiting new behaviors (or more realistically – a change in behavior) in the following ways:

- Friendlier attitudes toward others
- More smiles and greetings (even with strangers)
- Greater empathy for those who are suffering

- Enhanced respect and admiration for those on the front-line of the pandemic
- Increased innovation and creativity to produce things of value

Every day we see how this change in behavior helps all of us deal with our new reality, while also providing us with the ability to cope with hardship and loss.

Here are just a few examples of how people are exhibiting their new behaviors:

- Neighbors helping neighbors find needed supplies of food, sundries and other items
- Increased donations to food banks and homeless shelters
- Executives donating their salaries to help employees in need
- Lenders and landlords forgiving mortgage or rent defaults
- Various consultants offering free services to those who desperately require their area of expertise
- Franchise owners and celebrities donating millions to pay for hospital supplies, emerging research in vaccines, and the development of new treatments
- Hotel chains offering their rooms for health care workers or as a quarantine for those who have contracted the virus

While it is true that this type of generosity has long existed, it is uplifting to see that more people are displaying these behaviors than ever before.

Why are we Behaving this way?

As we take a step back to consider our recent calamity (and the change in behavior that has resulted), it is helpful to ponder the motivation for the positive behavior change.

Here are some of the reasons why I believe people have risen to the challenges that face all of us:

- Recognition of our own mortality
- Fear of the unknown
- A sense of responsibility to the community to do something positive
- The understanding that we cannot afford to let someone else do it
- An awareness that we have not done enough to help in the past

Regardless of the reason, I am encouraged to see the productive ways that most of us have reacted to the pandemic. However, the real challenge is how to incorporate these behaviors into our “new normal” once we emerge from the pandemic so they become sustainable over the next several generations. This is what I refer to as the “silver lining” resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

Similar to the way we altered airport security after 9/11, our approach to interacting with and supporting one another following the pandemic will be significantly altered – probably permanently.

What will you do today (and in the weeks ahead) to ensure that the best behaviors that we have seen over the past month become the “new normal” as we care for one another and show each other a new level of respect and gratitude?