

## What comes after the Great Pause?

By Karen S. Borofsky

As the effects of the coronavirus pandemic extend past what many thought would last just a few weeks, this strange period has touched all of us in some way, whether by the virus itself, or the fallout from it.

Those who are lucky enough not to contract the virus are enduring the realities of a world working to prevent that from happening and working to save those who have been affected.

Marked by remote work (or no work, or for some, newly dangerous work), volatile stock markets, online shopping, home schooling, etc., this period has earned the moniker the “Great Pause.”

Indeed, the din of life as we knew it not long ago has quieted. Environmentalists are writing volumes about the positive effects the Great Pause is having on our planet — cleaner air and brighter skies, fish appearing in the canals in Venice, decreased auto and rail traffic leading to less day-to-day rumbling and movement on the Earth itself.

We can draw parallels from this analysis to our individual worlds and think about significant ways this unique situation has affected us, as well.

Dr. Larry Richard, widely regarded as one of the leading experts on the psychology of lawyer behavior, suggests that we all need control, predictability and connectedness in our lives. When a crisis like this happens, those three things are greatly affected, if not eliminated.

Law firm and business leaders who recognize the import of maintaining the connections that naturally occur within our organizations are now spending the time to find new ways and new technologies that will help to recreate those



connections in the remote-work paradigm that has been suddenly foisted upon us.

Amidst challenge and calamity, it is human nature to rise up. There are countless examples of this throughout history — including recently during the 9/11 and the Boston Marathon tragedies. We make it a point to do good for others when we can — when we have time. And now, the Great Pause has given us that time.

There are grand gestures of generosity like the many wealthy who have donated millions to this fight, and more modest, grassroots efforts, like the small companies that have re-tooled to produce all manner of PPE for medical workers and, in turn, keep people employed.

At individual levels, our activities also have changed. We are spending more time with our spouses, our families and ourselves. There is time for reflection and introspection. There is time for a walk in the sun in the middle of the day, time for meals with family, time to plant a garden. There is time to look out for a neighbor or connect with old friends.

These activities are often the casualties of our “regular” fast-paced and frenzied lives — not because we do not want to do them, but because we simply do not have the time. And now we do.

When it is time for us to return to life as we once knew it, there will be many questions about how we re-form our work-life balance and our priorities.

In some respects, the Great Pause can be

likened to the start of an “elimination diet” in which we are all unwitting participants. An elimination diet, by definition, is an eating plan that omits a food or group of foods believed to cause an adverse food reaction. By removing certain foods for a period of time and then “reintroducing” them during a “challenge period,” the foods that are causing or exacerbating symptoms can be identified.

During the Great Pause, so many of the activities that contribute to our normally frenetic life-pace have been eliminated. We are, out of need, discovering new paths to the control, predictability and connectedness that we all desire in our lives.

We also are finding new ways to create joy and happiness, and rediscovering some of those practices that had become inadvertently dormant or diminished for so long.

Around the world, the course of the coronavirus is in different stages: just beginning, approaching peak load, flattening out, or even mercifully subsiding. When it is time for us to return to life as we once knew it, there will be many questions about how we re-form our work-life balance and our priorities. We all will have personal decisions to make about what work and lifestyle choices we are willing to “reintroduce” to our lives during the next “challenge period.”

The ability to successfully envision the impact of those choices — as individuals, as professionals, and as organizational leaders and decision-makers — is what we all will need to work on next.

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