

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Pandemic - Finding Silver Linings

April 1, 2020. I am a pessimist and I am operating under the assumption that we will still be practicing shelter-in-place many months from now, not a few weeks. I also believe that the impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus will be far-reaching and dominate our society for years to come, and the country won't be able to fully return to normal until a vaccine is readily available. It certainly won't be the same for senior citizens like me that have health issues and have to proceed with caution. But rather than focus on the bad news, I have tried to take a glass-half-full approach, identifying the silver linings.

Note: If you see other bright spots that could be added to the list, please drop me a quick message and I'll add it to the list.

National Education in Good Hygiene - washing hands frequently is now acquired habit

This an obvious one. After two weeks it is evident that everyone is washing their hands frequently. I expect that the habitual nature will likely stick after the pandemic subsides and wash your hands often will be adopted like buckling your seat every time you get your car. And acceptable social norms will be heightened, like the sniffing passenger on the plane in the seat next to you will no longer be tolerated.

New Class of Heroes and Heroines - a better appreciation for those who serve us.

Since 9/11 and the start of the conflict in the Mid-East almost two decades ago, Americans have publicly acknowledged and demonstrated their appreciation for members of the military and first-responders. We now have a new set of heros and heroines.....healthcare workers and even supermarket clerks who are risking daily exposure to the virus while we shelter at home.

Outpouring of Community Spirit - all in this together

With local businesses shuttered and everyone ordered to stay home, we are being faced with individual challenges to meet our daily needs for food and supplies. As more businesses lay off workers and the unemployment rolls begin to swell, we as a society have also heightened realization that disadvantage folks at the lowest economic can't be forgotten. Government is trying is trying to do its part with an economic stimulus but there are countless examples of community food banks and neighbors assisting the elderly.

Working Remotely - different but better

All of the TV news channels are operating in a distributed manner, broadcasting from their homes instead of a studio. Employees are working from home using collaborative tools like Microsoft Teams and Slack. Will this change in paradigm lead to more work-from-home jobs going forward? Will bosses be awakened to the realization employees actually work harder

when they work remotely? Will companies begin to realize the potential cost savings, eliminating the need for expensive office space.

Expanded Use of Digital Capabilities -- video conferencing and collaboration tools

My wife, Pat, volunteers at the local Alzheimer's Association, and every Wednesday afternoon she facilitates group meetings of patients and caregivers. For many in both groups these weekly meetings are the highlight of their week and they look forward to being with their new-found friends. Today the meetings will go on as usual except that it will be a video conference using Google Hangouts. Keep in mind, this is a collection of elderly people with limited computer skills and some with cognitive issues that have been able to set up their computers and learn how to use the application. If this group can overcome the technology barriers, then anyone can.

My son and his wife have a weekly happy-hour get together with neighbors that rotates house to house. The party is still going on except that everyone is staying at home and is connected using Zoom video-conferencing software. My wife stays in contact with her old college friends on a regular basis. Yesterday they had a 10-person Slack Chat to discuss COVID-19.

These are just a few examples that illustrate how lessons learned out of necessity due to COVID-19 might translate into broader changes in the way to communicate, learn and collaborate in the future. More importantly, as more people get exposed to new technologies and applications, the use of these capabilities in other ways will accelerate.

E-Learning - parents deeper involvement in children's education

Schools everywhere closed abruptly and teachers and students instantly became remote instructors and learners. Fortunately the basic Internet infrastructure is in place along with video-conferencing software. This rapid immersion may be bumpy at first but is likely to be a valuable step in broader use and expansion of educational opportunities. Parents have to become involved in the actual instruction, which could be providing a better insight into how their child is doing.

I worked most of my career in Higher Education and have long held the belief that the price of education does not equate to quality. Instead parents and students are paying for the whole social experience and network in addition to instruction. This uptick in E-Learning may be what is needed to raise the level of acceptance of online learning, leading to more affordable education for everyone.

Many private colleges with small endowments and rely primarily on tuition income are destined to be victims of this virus and economic crisis and go out of business. Maybe E-Learning is the element that helps replace this education void and keeps institutions in business?

Tele-medicine - changing the doctor/patient relationship

Before my actual appointment visit with my cardiologist he needs a series tests and lab work results in addition to having electronic access to my medical records. All the requisite tests can be performed at home or at a lab prior to visit. I currently have a kit to measure my PT/INR (blood density) which I self-report. I am also perfectly capable of self-reporting my vitals (i.e., blood pressure, pulse rate and weight). I can trigger an electronic analysis of my pacemaker. The only thing left is an EKG but unfortunately there is not currently a reliable device for patients to a home EKG. But it shouldn't be an issue for me to go to a lab and have an EKG that is transmitted to the doctor.

Tele-medicine has great potential and by way of an example I'd like to illustrate how it might work in a doctor/patient scenario. Currently I set up doctor's appointments as much as 6 months in advance. If the doctor has all the required information in advance, he could make a determination if an in-office appointment is needed or he could elect to do a video-conference appointment. If patients submitted required information more frequently, the doctor's office could periodically review his record and contact the patient only if needed. In this time when it is unknown how long vulnerable patients like myself will be sheltered-in-place and unable to visit their doctor, tele-medicine could become the modern version of doctor in-home visits that I remember as a child.

Politics taking a Backseat - virus is the common enemy, not politics

Politicians have the same common enemy (virus), not each other. They might still harbor disdain for each other but the public has little interest in listening to partisan politics and to those people who want to engage in the blame game or espouse conspiracy theories. We are not just concerned citizens, we are scared citizens interested in what is happening to combat the virus.

I like to think that maybe political polarization has temporarily taken a backseat, even in a Presidential election year? Political advertisements and incessant robo calls have ceased. The President is the leader in the battle whether we like it or not, and he is getting first-hand, battlefield experience and dealing with circumstances that have forced him to change positions and tactics. The Presidential race's political opposition is silent, as they should be.

Healthcare - has become the top national priority.

It is safe to say that the United States (and the rest of the world) were not prepared for the pandemic and not a time to play the blame game. Instead there are many lessons to learn; one of which will be the need to treat healthcare as the nation's top priority.

Reawakening Manufacturing - making supply chains with less reliance on foreign suppliers

The other prominent shortcoming has been the absence of medical gear and limitations presented by the fact that many of the suppliers are located in foreign countries who all had a

near for medical supplies. With computer-assisted automation becoming more prominent in all forms of manufacturing, now is the time to continue the push to bring back manufacturing to the United States. The government set out years ago to diminish America's oil dependence on other countries. The predicament we are in today should be enough reason to make a similar resolve in other industries.

Crisis in Oil Markets - prices down and carbon emissions down

Almost lost in the fret over the pandemic and the economy has been in the crisis in the oil market. The bad news is that the world market is flooded with excess capacity caused primarily by the pandemic, which has resulted in a sharp drop in consumption worldwide. The oil crisis further negatively impacts the stock market, Unfortunately this isn't a problem the U.S. can fix on its own and after years of striving for energy independence, some U.S. companies may go under, reducing our production capacity.

The good news (if you want to call it that?) is that prices at pump in the next couple of weeks are expected to drop to lowest levels in decades. People are driving much less so consumption is way down. Airlines are reporting over 90% drop in passengers. Another by-product of the sharp decrease in oil consumption is a corresponding drop in carbon emissions.

Television Viewing - relaxing watching movies as a family

I purposely left this for last. I am a big sports fan and this time of year I would be totally engrossed in March Madness. The good news is that after dinner each night we ask each other what do you want to watch tonight. So instead watching separate shows or going out, we are sitting down and spending time together. And it feels good!