

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Pandemic - Lifestyle Changes

April 7, 2020. It has been approximately 3 weeks since my wife, Pat, and I began sheltering in place. At first we had to come to the realization that the COVID-19 coronavirus had suddenly turned our world upside down, forcing us to restructure our daily lives. It also became obvious that the sooner that we accepted a new daily routine the easier it would be to adapt. However no matter what we did and how hard we tried to adjust, it was clear that we would be dealing with two other enemies besides the virus: boredom and stress.

As each day goes by two sets of numbers and corresponding graphs represent the virus growth and projections and secondly the financial markets. The fear of the virus has made citizens increasingly conscientious and following the guidelines for social distancing. Each day we see visual representations of the upward curve in the number of COVID-19 cases and the number of deaths. The daily count in the newspapers on TV brings back memories of the grim days of the Vietnam War when the daily tally of deaths was a part of the daily news.

Everyone's personal wealth has taken a hit and stock market watching has become part of the daily ritual. When the news relating to the virus is positive, the market rises, and conversely falls when the news disappoints. The big unanswered question is, when will we be back to normal? In the last few days the numbers indicate that the universal practice of social distancing seems to be working and the curve of the COVID-19 numbers are flattening. This information resulted in a rebound in the market and raising what I feel are false hopes that the end of the pandemic is in sight. Today the number of COVID-19 deaths in America reached the highest total.

Pat and I have elected to deal with the boredom and stress by simplifying our lives with the adoption of a new daily routine.

News - At first we watched the news on TV anxiously following the latest developments. Now we learn all we need to know by only spending a half an hour in the morning reading the main stories online and a half hour in the evening viewing the national news. In the process we have blocked out additional stress by avoiding all the political cable news channels that rely primarily on delivering partisan jabber on a non-stop basis. And we stopped watching the President's daily news briefings in which he rants go in many directions until he finally circles back to praising himself.

Exercise - We are lucky to have warm, sunny weather almost every day. I would rather be getting my physical exercise by playing golf but that stopped being an option two weeks ago. As a substitute I have started going to the condo association swimming pool daily and walking a couple of miles every morning and a shorter walk each evening around the property. Unfortunately the pool is now off limits. Pat exercises multiple times a day either walking, jogging, biking or kayaking; often with her sister. In any case exercise has become the go-to activity to combat boredom.

Food and Drink - Instead of making daily trips to the grocery store, we are now stocking up for the week and eating healthy at home most nights. We occasionally get takeout in an effort to continue to support our local restaurants. No more trips to Costco for the time being; we are concerned about the crowds. With a lot of time on our hands and always a few feet from the refrigerator, it would be easy to overindulge in food and drink. Instead we have concentrated on a balanced diet and limited alcohol. Pat has a single glass of wine in the evening and I have almost stopped drinking altogether.

Filling Time - Before the pandemic I had compiled a lengthy to-do list and it always felt like there wasn't enough time in the day. So with less distractions I have started chipping away. I also have made time to do things that I like to do. In my case that is to write, while Pat is doing a lot of reading. I have enjoyed exploring the use of new computer tools and filling in personal knowledge gaps. So overall we are doing things we enjoy and avoiding tasks that would induce tension or stress. There are some tasks that I would like to tackle but resolution requires verbal communication with companies or agencies, many of whom are too busy or not staffed during the pandemic stay-at-home order.

TV - It is likely that TV viewing is up in every household, but we have self-imposed restrictions on what we will watch and when we will watch. Many homes may have their favorite cable news channel running continuously all day but not us. Who needs the political bickering at a time like this? The one thing we do is sit down together every night and watch a movie or episodes of a series. This is not something that we did very often pre-pandemic. In the process we have become bigger fans of streaming and less tolerant of advertisement interruptions. I wonder if this aversion will carry over once the pandemic has passed?

Internet - Before the shelter-in-place order both my wife and I had already become heavy Internet users. Now we are addicted, constantly checking our iPhones and computers for email and messages. I have gone off on lengthy Google explorations on non-virus topics that have caught my fancy. My wife spends many hours trying to deal with issues related to the Alzheimer's Association, where she has volunteered for many years.

We have been frequent travellers, visiting our children and grand-children on a regular basis. Now we have become fans of video-conferencing and a week ago had a very nice meeting with the entire Gleason side of the family. When we asked our 13 year old niece how she was doing with e-Learning, she replied, "O.K. but I'll never complain about going to school again." One thing that has become noticeable with the increase in the video transmissions in our building has been the inability of our internal network to support the bandwidth requirements; an issue that the condo association needs to address.

Zoom - Everyone, including us, has discovered Zoom video-conferencing. Our grand-children are being schooled from home using Zoom. My wife is engaging in condo Board meetings and conversing with groups of friends. More than anything the general population is being introduced to a new technology that will continue to be use after the pandemic fades away. We

can expect zoom to be also become a verb, similar to the way we say “I’m going to google someone.”

Lifestyle - It is true that our day seems to be the same everyday, which may not be a good thing, but at least our adopted activity and lifestyle habits are lessening stress. At our age time seems to have flown by, but now time seems to be crawling as we try to keep our minds and bodies active. We formerly had a daily routine; now we have a new lifestyle, which is still healthy and productive. The challenge is merely to adapt but also what hasn’t changed is the conviction that peace of mind, health and happiness take a more prominent role over wealth.