

COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) Pandemic - Time of Reckoning

Today the country is in the grip of two battles: one with the COVID-19 virus and the other to save the United States economy. What makes these intertwining conflicts so unsettling is uncertainty. Everyone has been forced into a position of trying to plan and manage our daily lives without knowing what lies ahead. When will we recover: a month, 6 months, a year, longer, or never? While most have a more optimistic short horizon, my feeling is the impact will be far-reaching.

Two weeks ago I played a 3-day Member-Guest golf tournament at my golf club. Each day was filled with golf followed by cocktail hours and dinners that included about 120 golfers gathering together within the confined space of the clubhouse. Just about that time (2 weeks ago) the threat of the coronavirus was becoming more apparent and taking over the daily news. Looking back it is hard to believe that this public health crisis in America is only about two weeks old. It is so encompassing, it feels like it has been months.

These are crazy and confusing times; an experience that is all new to me and everyone else. There isn't much that we can do individually to solve both health and financial crises except hope and pray that our political leaders, as well as financial and disease control experts, have the wisdom to do the right thing. Do we just keep doing what we have always done and wait for the storm to pass with the expectation that everything will be back to normal? Or do we need to think seriously about adjusting some aspects of our lives? Or is this a wake-up call telling us to evaluate our individual lives and do a rebalancing, as they say in financial circles?

Note: I realize that an analysis is personal and different to every individual. Of course the circumstances are going to dictate the course pursued by each person. And each individual must decide if a personal evaluation is an exercise worth doing.

I have elected to accept what exists today, don't try to predict the future, and be guided by 7 principles or observations moving forward:

1. Stability - Inject in our daily lives a sense of stability, wherever possible, and find peace of mind and stop dwelling on the past.
2. Compliance - Act as an obedient citizen and strictly adhere to all the recommended health guidelines, such as social distancing;
3. Stress - Diffuse stress, especially avoid religious and political discourse.
4. Good News - Find "good news" in places and events that seem unlikely or unexpected.
5. Permanent Change - Recognize change that is going to be permanent and deal with it.
6. Boredom - Combat boredom by doing things you enjoy (for me, things like writing) as a replacement for activities and habits that are no longer possible, advisable or productive.
7. Connection - Stay connected with dispersed family members, friends and colleagues by learning and mastering social media, collaborative and video software services.

I turned 81 in February and like many others in my age group, I have medical issues, and the combination of age and health problems puts me in the special category of the most vulnerable for the COVID-19 virus. On the financial side my wife and I live on a combination of pensions, Social Security benefits and IRA proceeds. The recent plunge in the market has taken its toll on our investments but fortunately our risk exposure is limited. We will likely always have enough to live on, only our inheritance will suffer.

Like millions of other retirees, we live in Florida and enjoy the ability to get outside and exercise on a daily basis. For my wife, it consists of daily jogging, biking and/or kayaking. My exercise includes walks but up to now has been primarily confined to playing golf. While we can enjoy the luxury of outdoor activities, my wife and I are probably going to spend more time together in our home, presenting another set of challenges as we try to adapt to a new lifestyle.

I mention golf, which I had been playing 4 to 5 times a week for years, because it has been both a source of social interaction and exercise. It has also been a way for me to stay energized. I regularly compete with golfers that are all much younger than me. I guess maybe it makes me feel younger?

On Wednesday, March 25th the country club announced that the golf course was being closed per order of the county. So my primary source of exercise and entertainment was gone about the same time that the Dow Jones Industrial Average had lost over 8000 points in a matter of 3 weeks. That evening my wife and I decided it was a **time for reckoning**. It was time to recognize and accept a new world order, which included following the government suggested guidelines to shelter-in-place, and to plan together our new lifestyle.

More sobering is the realization that this new lifestyle that we are being forced to accept is going to be permanent for a long time (not until a vaccine is widely available) and there is not going to be a return to life as we knew it in a few weeks or a few months. For individuals like myself that fall in the most vulnerable category (i.e., elderly with medical issues) sheltering-in-place is the new normal.