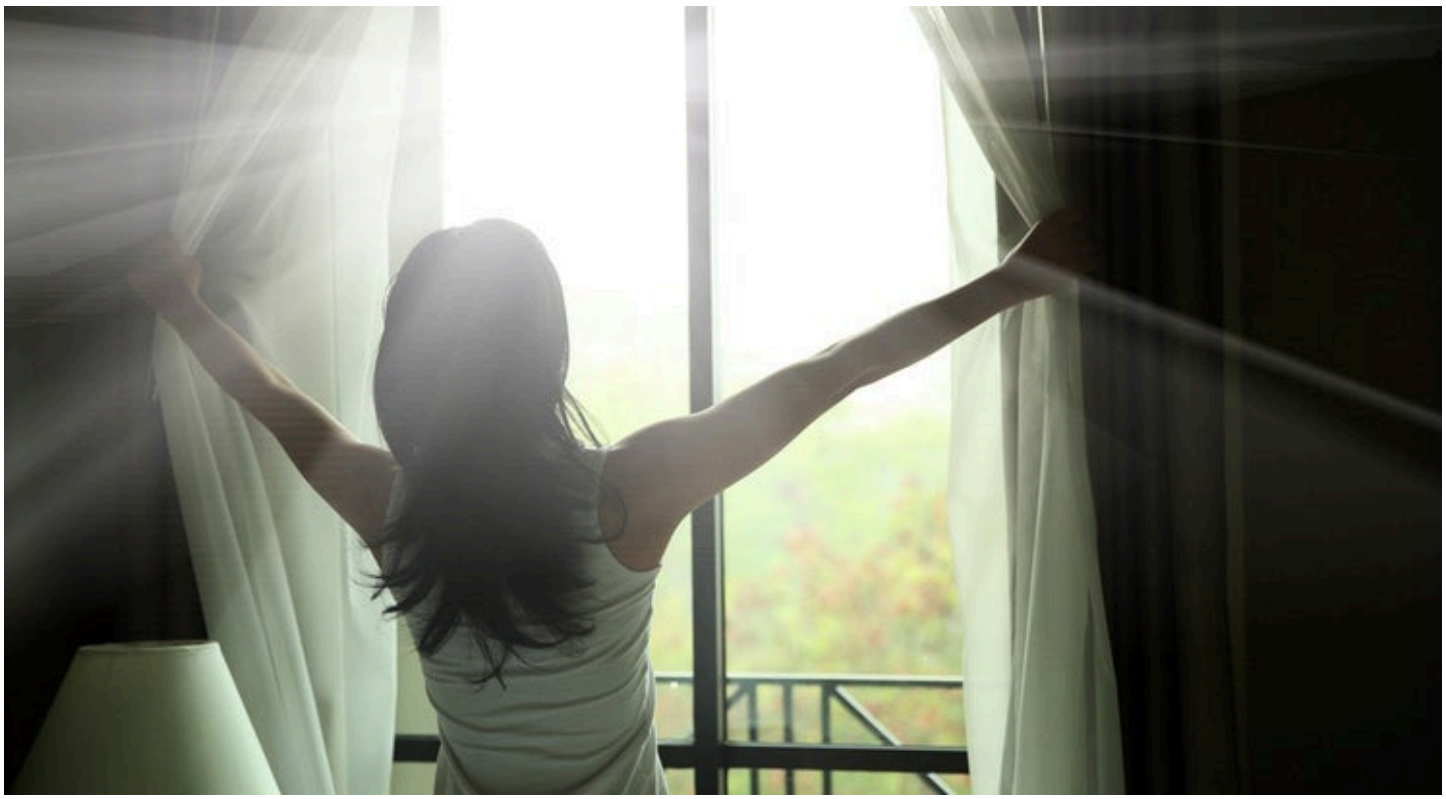
How to Keep a Positive Mindset in the COVID-19 Era

Career Development



When 2020 began, no one could have predicted that COVID-19 would bring much of the world to a halt. This is indeed a surreal and difficult time for us all. Human beings lost their lives and, sadly, continue to do so. People lost their livelihoods and, sadly, continue to do so. There is much to feel

sad and maybe even angry about, and yet, there are silver linings all around us.

I love the movie *Silver Linings Playbook*, based on the book of the same name by Matthew Quick. It offers comforting advice during this time like, “I don't want to stay in the bad place, where no one believes in silver linings or love or happy endings.” Thus, this month’s career column provides advice on how to stay positive and sane during this chaotic and challenging time.

“Look for the helpers”

Many of us are familiar with Fred McFeely Rogers, better known as Mr. Rogers’s, famous quote:

> *“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping’.”*

This is true now more than ever. We see nurses, doctors, police, firefighters, paramedics, members of the military, scientists, researchers, religious leaders, farmers, truck drivers, waste management professionals, grocery store workers, and countless other unsung heroes helping us get through this crisis.

A nurse who has worked in hospitals for decades told me that the next generation of nurses is stepping up during this challenging event. I took heart in that, knowing that countless nurses are truly reigniting their calling to help others, even as they themselves must feel scared, tired, sad, and overwhelmed. These helpers are carrying us all through this and I am eternally grateful for them. Look to them for solace and join them if you have skills that are useful during this pandemic.

Or, join efforts to support those on the front lines if you have time or money to give. For example, people are temporarily donating their RVs to healthcare workers so they don’t have to worry about infecting their families. New Jersey students produced 3D-printed face shields for first responders and medical professionals. It’s heartening.

Large companies are getting in on the act too with companies like Brooks Brothers, Under Armour, Fanatics, Honeywell, Nordstrom, as well as Xerox and Vortran Medical Technology utilizing their operations to make medical supplies. Hilton and American Express are donating one million hotel rooms across the United States to those working on the front lines. Helpers assisting the helpers has been a lovely silver lining amid the devastation of this pandemic.

> *“When she needed help most, she was abandoned — and only when she offered help to others was she beloved.” – Matthew Quick, Silver Linings Playbook*

Stay connected from afar

We keep hearing the refrain, “We’re all in this together,” and it’s true. We may not physically be together, but we are absolutely united in spirit. From Italians singing on their balconies while locked down to The iHeart Living Room Concert for America, we are showing our innate desire to connect with others even though sports arenas sit empty, Broadway is dark, and concert halls are vacant.

If you’re feeling news fatigue, take a break and search for these positive stories of inspiration and

empathy. While millions of US citizens file for unemployment, some CEOs are taking action to try to ensure their employees' stability. For example, the CEO of Texas Roadhouse forewent his year's salary for the sake of the company's struggling employees. When the quarantines lift, I will be sure to patronize Texas Roadhouse and other companies that did the right thing during these unprecedented times.

Some celebrities are turning their financial security into blessings for others, like Hollywood mogul Tyler Perry who paid the tabs at 44 Kroger grocery stores across the Atlanta area and left a US$500 tip for each of the 42 out-of-work servers at a Houston's Restaurant. Residential and commercial landlords are providing a rent respite with a Brooklyn landlord waiving April rent and Publix offering rent relief to businesses operating in the shopping centers it owns.

Cross off your to-do list

"You need to make time for your family no matter what happens in your life," *Silver Linings Playbook* advises, yet it is easy to lose focus of our priorities during all of the hustle and bustle of our daily lives. As such, this time is an opportunity to spend quality time with the loved ones in your home. Use this time to eat together, play games, and share other experiences. Puzzles are selling out because so many people are working on them while social distancing.

This is also a period when many are most connected with or reconnecting with their faith and spirituality. Religion offers comfort to those who believe and provides a community of fellow believers. Churches, synagogues, and mosques are hosting virtual services in order to safely keep in touch with their faithful and come together to pray and worship.

Additionally, now is the time to read that stack of books or articles or binge-watch new shows on Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, Disney+, and other streaming services. Reading and watching television and movies offer a welcome escape from the often anxiety-inducing COVID-19 news.

On social media, there are jokes and memes about how much weight people are gaining during social distancing, but there are also jokes about "prison bods," the latter suggesting a freer schedule allows people to work out more. This time of isolation is a perfect juncture to work on your health by, in part, getting in better shape. There are a plethora of apps on your phone with free and paid-for workouts, and YouTube has a myriad of free workouts — anything from dancing to Krav Maga to a standard workout.

I've noticed that many people I know are using this time to learn a new skill like cooking, which can be done by yourself or with family. This is an ideal circumstance during which to pick up a new language or watch training videos, some of which are being offered at a discount. There are CLE, project management, and Excel classes offered at discounted rates. Although some US states are relaxing their CLE deadlines or live requirements for now, it might be the right time to fit those precious CLE credits into your life.

Enjoy the rare quietness

We all hope that this strange time ends soon, most importantly, because of the tragic loss of lives and financial stability worldwide. Further, we want this to end so we can get back to life as we know it. However, because most of the world slowing down is such an oddity, we have a rare occasion to pause and appreciate the peace and silence.

Last week, I slept for eight hours straight for the first time in years. Although I'm concerned about the danger of this virus and the destruction to the economy because of it, I think my good night's sleep was a product of everything being less hectic around me. Streets are quieter; people are less rushed.

Oddly, in a time of viral terror, there is a certain tranquility in our responsibility to stay at home and not infect ourselves and others. It's one of the silver linings to this tragedy:

> *"Let me tell ya. You gotta pay attention to signs. When life reaches out with a moment like this, it's a sin if you don't reach back... I'm telling you." – Matthew Quick, Silver Linings Playbook*

Soak up nature

The quiet also allows us to get back in touch with nature. When I go to the grocery store, I notice more and more people out biking, walking, jogging, and enjoying the sights and sounds of the outdoors — as they remain a safe distance from one another. It's a healthy reminder for all of us that, although it seems like life has stopped, our lives as we remember them will be back. The birds still soar overhead; the waters still ebb and flow; the sun still rises and sets. Nature does not know of this dangerous virus, the spread of which we're all trying to slow, and there's a certain comfort in that.

A family of ravens visits my house every day; the alligators are busy in my pond, maybe because mating season is coming; blue herons, which can only be described as modern dinosaurs, are building a nest in the tree behind my house; two pelicans visit my pond on occasion, as well as cormorants, egrets, limpkins, and ibises.

All of this life surrounding me, coupled with the sunrise and sunset each day, keeps me grounded and reminds me that life does indeed go on and we will return to the life we once knew and, perhaps in some ways, better than ever.

Silver Linings Playbook weighs in on the importance of the beauty surrounding us: "...maybe God will be pleased enough to lend me some help, which I think is why He has been showing me interesting clouds for the past week."

Appreciate what you took for granted

Matthew Quick wrote, "Most people lose the ability to see silver linings even though they are always there above us almost every day."

Many of us have been so busy that we've taken for granted seemingly innocuous and enduring aspects of everyday life like visiting grandparents, grocery shopping, shaking hands, being part of a crowd at sports games and concerts, or dining out at a restaurant. Perhaps, when all is back to the routine and this strange era is a distant memory, we will have gratitude for the simple things that, aggregated, make life sublime.

Learn from this

Being raised by a registered nurse, I have always been aware of the spread of germs. Truth be told, people have teased me over the years for washing my hands or, if I didn't have soap and water readily available, using anti-bacterial hand sanitizer after someone shook my hand at work or wiping down surfaces after people were leaning/working on them.

Now, everyone knows that it does matter. It always matters. It's just clear now how much it matters. I've always loved the "My Cabbage" episode of the US television medical show Scrubs for its depiction of how fast an outbreak can happen and its devastating consequences. As Dr. Kelso, the chief of medicine, explains how easily infection can spread, the pathogen passes from one person to another, making each victim glow green.

A boy sneezes and, as his mother wipes his nose, her hand glows green; that woman shakes hands with a doctor whose hand glows green; a nurse runs into said doctor, causing his paperwork to fall, helps him pick the papers up, and her hand glows green; that nurse touches a patient's shoulder, which glows green as Dr. Kelso says, "And just like that, you have a patient in trouble." If you haven't seen it, it's definitely worth watching, especially in today's climate.

Perhaps, yet another silver lining of this awful pandemic will be that more people have learned how to employ good hygienic practices and, going forward, this will help minimize the spread of other pathogens.

Another positive change we may see as we move forward is additional work flexibility. Indeed, this has been remote work's time to walk out from the wings, step onto the world stage, and shine. Schools and workplaces around the globe moved to a telecommuting model to stop the spread of COVID-19.

Those who were skeptical of remote work are likely thankful that it's possible right now. Those who doubted that remote work can be successful are learning that it can be. Those who failed to see the overwhelming benefits of a remote work option feel them, some of which are:

- Increased ability to attract and retain top talent;
- Reduction in costs for the organization;
- Reduction in costs for employees on commuting, dry cleaning, gas, lunches, parking, child and elder care, dog walkers, and more;
- Time savings by eliminating employee commutes and employee chatter/gossip;
- Increased productivity and focus;
- Better (and easier) work-life balance;
- Better health;
- Decrease in office politics; and
- Positive environmental impact.

With our technological capabilities, remote work is here to stay. The need for it to reduce the effects of the coronavirus is showing the world how beneficial remote work is during times of crisis and; thus, how beneficial it can continue to be during times of calm.

Finally, the world has learned invaluable lessons about preparedness for a pandemic; thus, we should be much more prepared if and when another one hits.

There are numerous other lessons our society at large can learn and implement when the acute part of this crisis is over. Only time will tell what they will be, but the thought of it offers fresh hope for even

better tomorrows.

> *“If clouds are blocking the sun, there will always be a silver lining that reminds me to keep on trying.” – Matthew Quick, Silver Linings Playbook*

Prepare for a season of fullness

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan’s Easter Sunday homily during the live-streamed Mass at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City was about emptiness before fullness. We may be in a season of emptiness right now, but it is sure to lead to a season of fullness.

Put another way by Matthew Quick, “I’m thinking this is the part of my movie where things appear as if nothing is going to work out. I have to remind myself that all movie characters go through this sort of dark period before they find their happy ending.” We will come out of this and we will be stronger, individually and collectively.

If you’re struggling during this time, I hope this month’s column helped. If your despair is interfering with your life, please talk to a trusted loved one and/or seek professional help. Otherwise, hang in there, wash your hands, and take care of each other.

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products.