

Motivation and emotion in a time of lockdown

After almost four weeks of lockdown I've started to notice a strange thing. For a person who is highly motivated, and indeed I've almost finished my next book, Blogs for CEOs during these weeks, I still find myself strangely lacking in energy and my normal level of productivity.

Speaking to clients, some who are in senior leadership roles are staying focused and engaged. Others are extremely stressed about the uncertainty of the future. Those who are in large, high contact organisations like food retail and mining are deeply concerned about the possibility of high rates of infection and even possible deaths among their employees as the lockdown ends. Leaders who care greatly for their people, the responsibility weighs heavily at personal level. As "A" type, high productivity leaders, who are used to managing their emotions, they are finding it difficult to manage their feelings at this time, even though they may find this hard to admit, even to themselves. Some of my clients have admitted to feeling low, almost depressed at times and to being annoyed with themselves about feeling like that. Opening up about such matters only happens towards the end of a coaching session and it is much harder to make that true connection via videoconference.

Among my broader group of friends, we've talked about how strange it is not to be active and productive. 27 days into lockdown we haven't done things we thought we would do, like watch endless series on Netflix, or read dozens of books. Many have moved into a sort of hibernation mode, where you can't believe it's been four weeks of lockdown already and where did the time go? There's constant worry, in particular for breadwinners, about what the future holds, what's going to happen to the economy, are we going to have jobs to go back to? There is also an endless round of home schooling, cooking, cleaning, trying to work from home that leaves surprisingly little "free" time.

Some friends are in denial. "The lockdown wasn't necessary." "The whole thing is ridiculous". "It's no worse than a bad flu so why have we shut down the economy?" "And anyway, it only affects the old and the compromised, so let them get it and let's not ruin the entire economy for the sake of their lives." Perhaps it feels a bit different when suddenly it's their old people who start to die. That's a shock.

In all of this I see reflections of the cycle of grief. That well-known path of mourning that leads from denial, to anger, depression and finally acceptance. We are grieving the world and the life we have lost, for how long we know not. We will probably cycle through the phases, feeling sad, frustrated, annoyed, irritated, calm, cross, relieved to be safe, scared of the impact and the unknown future. The strangeness of the shopping experience, the empty roads as we drive to collect essentials. The petrol tank that suddenly seems to last forever. Recovery from grief is not a straight and even road, and dealing with this Coronavirus will be similar. No matter how strong you are, accept your emotions. Grant yourself permission. Sit with the emotions, allow yourself to feel disconsolate, low, angry, to deny the sense of it all. There's no point in dismissing these emotions. They are not going to go away.

What you can do is confront your deepest fears. If you are worrying during the night, or feeling anxious, take the time to write down your fears and to address full on what you can do to prevent the worst from happening. In some cases you may not have control over that, so write down what you will do if the worst does happen. Because fears confronted usually diminish and you may surprise yourself with what you'll come up with as a plan to deal with them.

There's a good [Tedtalk](#) by Tim Ferris on Fear of Failure where he describes a clever process to face your fears. Divide a page into three columns. In column 1 make a list of what is worrying you. All of it, no matter how bad. In column 2 write down anything you can do to prevent this thing from happening. In column 3 write down how you will manage if this awful thing does happen and what you will do to fix it. Facing your worst fears, like facing down a bad bully, is the best way to address them.

Here are a couple of mine, I would imagine that many of us have fears like these.

| Fear | Prevent | Repair |
|--|--|---|
| 1. That I will have no business left when this is over | Stay close to clients. Don't worry about money now. Be there for them because I care about them as people and they are going through as much as me and more. | When lockdown ends be really disciplined about restarting the business through business development... etc |
| 2. That my loved ones in Europe, the US, and eventually here in Africa, who are vulnerable will get it and die | I cannot prevent this. This is beyond my control. | The only thing I can do is stay close family, talk to them regularly, let them know I'm here and I love them. Be there for them. |
| 3. | | |
| 4. | | |
| 5. | | |
| 6. | | |
| 7. | | |