

Civility and COVID-19



Just four weeks ago, we were all going to work, planning spring break vacations, looking forward to graduation ceremonies, and walking into grocery stores assured that we could purchase every item on our list. Today, we are all dealing with challenges none of us expected just a month ago. The onset of the COVID-19 has caused stress, anxiety, and change in routines and behaviors on a global scale. It is in these times of emotional peaks when remaining civil can be a challenge. Here are three things to remember in these challenging circumstances:

- Assume Best Intentions – No one wanted the coronavirus to happen. Nobody wished for it. No one was sitting a back room thinking, “oh, I can’t wait to cancel everyone’s plans for the next several months.” We are all reacting to the unknown and the vast majority of people and organizations are doing the best they can. Give people the benefit of the doubt.

- Choose My Response – Years ago, a man named Jack Canfield created a formula $E+R=O$, or Event + Response = Outcome, and explained that we spend far too much time focusing on the EVENT (which we can't change because it already happened), and instead should focus on our RESPONSE (which is entirely within our control). Even in the most uncertain times, we all have 100% control over our response to the events swirling around us. The coronavirus happened. It is here. You cannot change that event. Nor can you snap your fingers and re-start March Madness, get kids back in school, or make toilet paper re-appear on store shelves. What you CAN control is your response to the events, and it is your response that impacts the outcome.

For example, my cousin had her wedding scheduled for March 21st, and by the time the happy day arrived, no more than 10 people could attend her ceremony. The months of planning and preparation for wonderful ceremony and reception, all gone because of this virus. Surely, she was disappointed that her wedding day was up-ended, but she chose to respond with joy and grace, rather than bitterness. And, by choosing a positive response, she got the best outcome she could given the circumstances she was in. She got married to the man she loves, she shared that moment with family and friends with a live stream of the ceremony, and she is planning to celebrate with a new reception when conditions allow. That's choosing a great response, which will ultimately yield a positive outcome.

Finally, remember that the response you choose is an EVENT, that someone else must now deal with. Is your response a positive event for someone else, or a negative one?

- Choose Grace – And if you're ever struggling to determine what your response should be, choose grace.

Each one of us is going through some change or struggle, and there is no reason for us to make that struggle harder for one another. This is hard. Don't make things harder. Be considerate. Be kind. Spend more time helping with solutions than pointing out problems.

For months before the arrival of COVID-19, the news was full of stories about how divided we are as a nation – politically, racially, geographically, economically, and so on. Now, in this moment, we must find success together. Assume best intentions. Choose your Response. Choose Grace. Take care of one another – even if it is from six feet away.

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