

2020 Vision: Differing perspectives of a pandemic

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This wasn't the plan. I think we can all agree that this was not the way 2020 was supposed to unfold. '2020' – it sounded perfect – futuristic. The start of a new decade holding such promise. Instead the entire globe has retreated, transformed beyond recognition, our lives fundamentally altered – perhaps forever.

Many are pouring out their hearts and words and we glean from them such differing perspectives – from splendid isolation to grief, from calm to chaos. Each person's experience is so different from the next.

My own experience of this pandemic is a hugely mixed bag by virtue of the myriad of lenses through which I am viewing this crisis. Employment lawyer. Doctor's wife. Home schooling mother. Frustrated shopper. Concerned friend, relative, neighbour... the list is long. My expectations, hopes and fears for the future are similarly mixed. I don't pretend to have the answers, but these are a handful of my observations, predictions and wishes.

Employment

Starting with what I know best, employment law. In over a decade of practice, I have not seen anything of this scale hit the employment arena. Even the financial crisis pales by comparison.

Whilst I have no doubt that we will all appreciate and value face to face contact much more after a period of (un)social distancing, I suspect that the costs savings, ease and effectiveness of remote working and interactions will result in increasing use of remote working and supporting technologies. If the World Wars were the catalyst for women's presence in many workforces, Covid-19 will likely serve as the catalyst for the further decline of the 9-5 commute and city office based existence. That said, it will probably also make us realise the limits of such ways of working. For example, a subject close to my heart at present: primary school education. Home schooling has (literally) brought home to me that this is something best done at school in a classroom environment with a teacher!

On a more serious note, I fear the ultimate fallout of this crisis will inevitably involve increasing job-losses on a large scale as businesses fold and shrink. I hope that the furlough scheme and other supportive provisions not only continue for as long as they are needed but are also developed into something that can assist those adversely affected on a long term basis. More of a wish than a prediction perhaps, but a multi-faceted scheme that provides not only financial support but also skills training and job placement is going to be essential. It also needs to plug gaps so that no-one falls through the cracks of provisions. The state of worker status law has long aggrieved me – the complexities of defining status and lack of clarity and parity regarding rights and obligations is particularly frustrating. My hope is that recent events will have shone a light on the dangers of the system and prompt an overdue overhaul to be actioned to simplify the system and make it fairer.

It is also often true that in times of crisis, new businesses are born. There are already many examples of people turning their hand to something new (see the boxer turned fruit and veg delivery man). My hope is that the government and banks find ways to support viable fledgling businesses at this point and beyond to help fuel economic recovery. Might we also see a return to more local manufacturing and production?

Health

My husband's role as a hugely busy intensive care doctor on the front-line in this crisis is something that makes me incredibly proud (and, in truth,

also rather nervous). The bravery and stoicism displayed by him and his colleagues across the NHS is genuinely nothing short of heroic. Triple shifts. 24 hour shifts. Constant research and communications. The list goes on and the weekly applause cannot even begin to thank them all for their dedication and courage on behalf of us all. They are effectively at war – soldiers in the most distressing trenches – without always having the armoury needed. From the bottom of my heart I wish them and theirs only good health and success in all of their endeavours.

When this is over (let it be soon!) my hope is of course that the warmth that is felt now not only continues but is translated into unstinting and never ending commitment to fund and support the NHS and reward its workers. This is not a given so we must do what we can to support it.

It is also fair to say that, particularly with a husband working at the sharp edge of this crisis, the loss, devastation, grief and heartbreak that this virus is causing within and beyond our own circles is particularly keenly felt. I believe that we all feel more conscious than ever of the value of health and appreciative of those we love. I also anticipate that that will stay with us long after this pandemic has passed.

Kindness

It is often said that ‘a little kindness goes a long way’ – and I wholeheartedly agree. To the sixth former whose exams were cancelled who did my shopping when I could not get to the shops I say thank you. To the neighbour who delivered fruit and veg – thank you. To the many, many people who have offered and performed acts of kindness and sent messages of support, thank you! My children’s favourite was undoubtedly the school that posted activities for them through our door with little notes of thanks – a positive side of having a doctor daddy at this moment. In turn, we have delivered supplies to others and they have sung songs to our lovely neighbours and serenaded older family members – little moments of joy in difficult times.

I don’t pretend that the world is all rosy – but many will emerge from this with stronger and better relationships with their neighbours and having done or been the recipient of acts of kindness. Aside from street parties (surely the end of every war deserves them?) I hope that at the end of all this we continue to prove that there is such a thing as society.

Innovation

Last but not least, and indeed linked to all of the above, I have heard first-hand of fundraising efforts to create PPE on 3D printers and also seen what valuable equipment that has created. Amazing stuff and, like video calls, part of the pandemic’s reminder of the positive potential and uses of technology. I predict that the rapid progress in this sphere will continue – fuelled by the current needs – and look forward to seeing what exciting developments emerge. Hopefully then the 2020s will start to look and feel more like what we expected...

If you would like further information on any of the points touched on in this piece, please do contact a member of [our team](#).

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