

## J. Michael Locke

### Musings

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#### #42: Choose Your Words Carefully II and New Order for Consumers II

#### May 3, 2020

On April 15 in Musing #24, I wrote about choosing your words carefully as a leader to frame discussions. The Covid-19 crisis is a real time example. I think politicians have been mistaken to focus on *shelter at home*. Between all of the essential businesses which are open and basic life needs, the great majority of people are leaving their home every day. Rather, I think the focus should be on *social distancing*. Technically, staying at home is just the extreme form of social distancing but it is also the most controlling if imposed by a government official. Thus, the rant by Elon Musk during his earnings call: "The extent of shelter in place or frankly what I would call it forcibly imprisoning people in their homes is against all their constitutional rights ... and erasing peoples freedoms in ways that are horrible and wrong and not why people came to America or built this country, what the f—k." The protests are growing in state capitols. Governors should be all about *social distancing* and stay away from quarantine or shelter at home.

Schools are also making mistakes in describing themselves as "closed." Tuition is still getting paid at private schools. Schools are not closed, the learning has just moved off campus. "Remote" learning sounds like someone is on Mars. "Distance" learning doesn't sound warm and endearing. "Online" learning implies the focus on the computer. Personally, I would describe it as "at home" learning. The children used to be learning at school but now they are learning at home.

For colleges, the question is whether you can move back to "on campus" learning in the Fall not whether you will be "open." Leaders should talk about welcoming students back to campus to use campus facilities and separate that from the modality in which courses will be delivered. You simply don't know right now whether a course will be in person, online or blended. Per Musing #19 Managing Forward, I recommend you do scenario planning when the future is particularly uncertain like now. Here is an excerpt from the Indiana University President's letter (thanks Kim DeBoer):

*Scenario 2 is a "hybrid" reopening in the fall involving both in-person and virtual teaching and research. At this point, this is the scenario we believe is the most likely, though this could change rapidly with some new positive or negative development. The balance between in-person and virtual teaching would emerge from the impact of continuing public health directives. This scenario has several variations, each of which would require a high level of flexibility to accommodate rapid change in the course of the pandemic, as well as the need to accommodate students and faculty who are unable to attend class in-person -- whether due to illness, self-isolation, special vulnerability to COVID-19 or travel restrictions.*

*Flexibility could take many forms. It could involve classes offered both in-person and virtually. It could also involve prioritizing some classes for in-person or for virtual instruction, based on their size, content or other characteristics; creating modular classes that are designed to include both in-person and virtual elements, or that can switch from one mode to another very quickly; rethinking the weekly schedule, to*

*spread out larger classes, for example, to allow for smaller sections; or, most likely, some combination of these and other measures.*

On March 28 in Musing #6, I wrote about the new order for consumers. Things are pretty ugly. It was reported on Wednesday that consumer spending (which represents almost 70% of GDP) was down 7.6% in Q1 (and that only partially reflects the Covid 19 lockdown). People need to be earning money to spend it.

Another 3.8mm Americans filed for unemployment (and more are trying but poor government technology a problem). Remember, there are roughly 331 million Americans. If you take out those not eligible for work, or those who don't want to, and we only have 162.9 mm seeking to work and now 30 million of them have filed for unemployment in six weeks! Econ geeks can see data tables [here](#). Our economy does not work when less than 50% of folks are earning income to pay bills and spend money. We have to get back to work!

Leaders can also shape conversation by the data they present. Every day we hear about the number of new Covid-19 cases and deaths. Personally, I need more context. How many people are dying from other causes every day? Recently, I heard some news stories on how total deaths now exceeded those in Vietnam War but is that the right comparison? How many usually would die from car accidents or the regular flu during the same time frame? We don't shut down society for those. Personally, I need that data to form an educated opinion.

Be safe.

Jml

### *Second Thoughts*

Former Treasury Secretary and Alcoa CEO Paul O'Neill passed last week. My friend Jeff Kupfer had a chance to serve as his Deputy Chief of Staff and shared a letter on his leadership you can read [Paul O'Neill leadership](#). I love the three questions O'Neill demanded his team be able to answer yes: (1) Am I treated with dignity and respect? (2) Do I have the tools I need to do my job? and (3) Did anyone notice? That is good leadership.