

REFRAMING COVID-19

Written by Derek Hill, CPA., CA., Broker of Record for Hill Kindy

PERSPECTIVE

We all know that these are not the best of times and for many, the personal tragedy has made it the worst of times. After 3 weeks of closure which is really not that long, it has seemed like a lifetime with no definitive end in sight. We have all been receiving a multitude of emails addressing government assistance programs, advice on what to do with credit cards and outstanding bills, how to deal with the banks and how to recover when it is all over. Mostly messages preying on and addressing our fears. Most of us are stressed and concerned about the uncertainty that lies ahead.

In the midst of all this I happened to be watching a war movie set in current times. I found myself thinking about the millions of people who have been displaced as a result of modern wars. In Syria alone since the conflict started in 2011, 6.5 million people have lost their homes and been displaced. According to various respected sources (the UN, the World Bank and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights), by the end of 2018 almost 400,000 civilians had lost their lives in a war that has lasted for almost 10 years. Imagine having 10 years of such uncertainty, imagine having an 8-year-old child who has never known anything but a refugee camp or worse. As much as our current situation is scary and stressful, I found myself extremely thankful that as a Canadian this could be the worst that I will ever experience in my life.



REFRAMING THE VIRUS

"The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another"

~ William James

All situations that happen to you in life have no inherent meaning other than the meaning that you assign to it. By "reframing" the way you look at something you can change how you experience it. It has been said since ancient times that "you can't always control what happens to you, but you can always control how you react to different situations — no matter how tough they are".

We are definitely in tough times. As of noon on April 13th over 117,000 people worldwide have died from the COVID-19, with more than 735 being Canadians. It was suggested in late March that over 2M Canadians would soon be out of work. These are the facts, and factually they are devastating. No amount of "reframing" will erase what has been done.

If, however, we are to emerge from this scourge even stronger than before it began, it is imperative that we start looking at COVID-19 in a frame other than one of doom and gloom. What we need to do is to find the silver lining.

Be active not passive. Rather than thinking "I can't do anything about this" try thinking "What is one small step that I can take?"

Be positive not negative. Rather than "I don't want to work on that right now" try "What part could I try now, that would make me feel even a tiny bit happier?"

Support the future with the past. Rather than "I'm not good at managing money" try "If I imagine myself a great money manager, what would I be doing with my money that would make me more successful?"

Get unstuck. If you are stuck thinking "I can't get this project started" try "What did I do in the past to complete successful projects? What tools from then can I use now?"

Turn lemons into oranges. Rather than "being a perfectionist negatively effects what I do" try thinking "what about being a perfectionist can I do to help me now with my work or life?"

Shift from victimization to empowerment. Rather than thinking, "That always happens to me" try "Sometimes I do that to myself; I just need to stop doing that".

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT PRACTICE VALUES?

Prices of any investment, perhaps with the exception of precious metals, go down when there is major uncertainty. Initially the same will likely be true of dental practices, however dental practice values should remain relatively stable. There will likely be a difference between practice values and practice selling prices. Any drop in the selling price of dental offices will be a function of buyer nervousness or seller panic. Historically dental revenues and values have been relatively stable during times of economic uncertainty. The fact that your office has been closed for several months is what we call an anomaly which is something that temporarily effects the profitability and value of any business but does not impact on its long-term financial health.

The coronavirus will pass, and the economy will recover, it is just a matter of time and none of us know how long that time will be. In the interim, your patient's dental disease or discomfort is not going to miraculously disappear - in fact some cases might even worsen. Once the population has decided that it is safe to resume normal activities it is very possible that dental appointments will be in very high demand.

Assuming that we have a stable recovery (no second waves) and that dental office profitability returns to previous levels, we do not anticipate any erosion of practice value. It is likely that some dentists, close to retirement, may feel that they have had enough and rush to sell once the economy opens up. Fortunately, there is a big demand such that any temporary large influx of practices for sale should be easily incorporated into the marketplace.



THERE IS NO NEW NORMAL

What will the “New Normal” look like?

The real answer to that question is that nobody really knows. There will be changes for sure, there will be people wearing masks, an increase in recognition of personal space, and perhaps an increase in the usage of hand sanitizers. These are obvious changes because they are extensions of current precautions, but what will the new normal look like and particularly how will it look for dentistry?

There has been lots of speculation on this front — much of it negative. What you need to consider is how much of the negative forecasts have been influenced by the current state of affairs. When future forecasts are made during dire times it is only natural that the forecasts will be gloomy. Let's consider what *will have* changed by the time our current situation passes. Your tools of the trade will not have dramatically changed; A handpiece will

still be a handpiece. Dental disease and discomfort will not have changed. There may be some new regulations around controlling the potential aerosol spread of infectious agents in the office which may require some new equipment. The biggest change that dentistry will face in the “New Normal” will be changed patient perceptions of infectious safety, and this is something you can control.

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Back in the day when surface infection was first recognized as a health risk, I visited an office that was totally covered with plastic wrap. Did all the wrapping make the office safer? Maybe, but the office was pristine to start with. I can tell you however, what did cause the patients to “freak out” was the fact that **EVERYTHING** in the office

was covered with plastic wrap; light switches, door knobs, anything that the dentist or the patient might possibly touch. Patients left with the feeling that there must have been something wrong with that practice. Truthfully, it was a little overkill and there was a lot of inadequate communication.

The best approach would be to make whatever infection control changes are mandated and then make sure you communicate what you have done to your patients in such a way so that they understand it.

There may be some new roles in the office, perhaps an infection coordinator - If there are changes like this, don't look at it as an inconvenience. Instead look at matters like this as opportunities to show your patients that it is safe to come back to the dentist. Nobody really knows what the “New Normal” is going to look like but whatever it is, find a way to embrace it and use it as a marketing tool.



A TOOL LIBRARY YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS

One of the most proficient future thinkers anywhere is Dan Sullivan, the founder and leader of Strategic Coach, a highly regarded organization known for coaching entrepreneurs. Dan has created a number of exercises designed specifically to find a silver lining in our current "Scary Times." Below you will find Strategic Coach's introduction to the library and associated links to each of the tools. I heartily encourage you to peruse.

Strategic Coach: A "Scary Times" Tool Library for Entrepreneurs

For the first time in history, our entire global community is being asked to change how we live, how we socialize, and how we do business, and that could be scary for anyone. Fortunately, entrepreneurs are hard-wired for this kind of unpredictability. It's what you signed up for when you started your own business, and it's in your DNA to not just survive, but actually thrive in situations like these.

But that doesn't mean you don't deserve a helping hand.

That's why we're sharing our most important tools for getting through scary times, designed by Dan Sullivan himself. Consider this the ultimate at-home workout routine for your mind. Use it to flex your positivity muscle, condition your focus, and strengthen your resolve to keep growing, no matter what life throws your way.

The Positive Focus® Exercise

- ▶ Keep track of all your wins, big or small.
- ▶ Avoid entitlement and cultivate an abundance mindset.
- ▶ Build your confidence!

Ctrl+Click the link below:
<https://strategiccoach.com/resources/positive-focus>

"Scary Times" Skills Exercise

- ▶ Reflect back on other scary events in your past.
- ▶ Extract the lessons or new understanding you gained from those events.
- ▶ Gain confidence in your ability to handle current uncertainty.

Ctrl+Click the link below:
<https://strategiccoach.com/resources/scary-times-skills>

First 100 Days Exercise

- ▶ Reflect on everything you've done up until now.
- ▶ Look ahead to new opportunities that are suddenly possible.
- ▶ Develop a plan for growth.

Ctrl+Click the link below:
<https://strategiccoach.com/resources/first-100-days>

WHAT SHOULD I DO NEXT?

First, you should work through the Strategic Coach's "Scary Times" Tool Library. If you do nothing else, do this.

If you follow through with the above, you will know that your positive business focus will be directed towards what you can do for your patients, your staff and any other stakeholders.

Externally you should be turning to your mentors and advisors who can help you make the most of this "free" time.



SELF-DETERMINATION

In psychology, self-determination is an important concept that refers to each person's ability to make choices and manage their own life. This ability plays an important role in psychological health and well-being. Self-determination allows people to feel that they have control over their choices and lives and has an impact on motivation — people feel more motivated to take action when they feel that what they do will have an effect on the outcome.

FINAL THOUGHTS

1. Don't Panic: After all of this you might feel pressured to sell just to be done with it. Just remember the ancient proverb "Measure once cut twice, measure twice cut once" Make sure you think the situation through and don't act on emotion. Be calm — the ability to not over-react keeps your mind clear.

2. Be Friends with Your Banker: Like it or not, your banker is an often-neglected member of your team. During times of financial stress, it is always better for you to call your banker than for your banker to call you. The best way to financially weather the storm is to make sure that all of your key stakeholders are part of your survival and re-emergence plan. Call your banker, you might also get some low interest money.

3. Reach Out to Experts: This is the perfect time to reach out to a whole variety of experts including your accountant, insurance broker, financial planner, practice enhancement coach and of course your transition advisor. Like the patient's tooth that you have been "watching" - now is the time to fix it.

4. This Will Pass: This too shall pass - it might pass like a kidney stone, but it will pass. You can't calm the storm so stop trying. What you can do is calm yourself - the storm will pass.

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