Finding the Good in Bad Times (AKA 2020)

It’s time to take on 2021, but don’t completely push 2020 out of your memory.

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Dear 2021: I don’t want any trouble from you. Just come in, sit in the corner, don’t touch anything and keep your mouth shut.

I ended 2020 with a humorous social media graphic containing the above message. Although it was pithy and pretty funny, there is an important flip side to this sentiment. That flip side begs the question, “what did we personally learn from 2020?” I think that question is important to consider. Complaining about the things that went horribly wrong is easy. Finding the positive in difficult situations is not. I believe that finding the gems in life is the best way to move forward successfully.

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I learned a great deal from 2020. Here are my seven takeaways.

1. Microdose the news! I learned to get what I needed to know from news apps and to not obsess about problems by watching the news hour after hour. Negative news sells and the media has become the master of sharing negative news (technically, it’s now opinions as much, or more, than actual news).

2. One valuable lesson I observed involved a man who told me he was able to keep his job but that he had to work from home. He also needed to care for his children and help to keep them on task for their schoolwork. The double duty stressed him out. During our conversation, he realized his situation was actually an opportunity to spend much more quality time with his young children. Although this was challenging, it might be a time period they look back on with fondness because of the experiences they had together. When he embraced this idea, his vision of the situation completely changed. That was a lesson I hope many others with children experienced.
3. I witnessed focus beating out fear for many entrepreneurs. When people are frozen by fear, they have no hope. But when fear gives them focus, they not only have hope but are much more likely to weather the storm. Hope is more powerful than fear. Hope is that little voice inside you whispering to you what “can be” when everyone around you is screaming about “what can’t be.” Hope plus a plan plus action will lead you successfully through challenges.
4. I learned that during difficult times your network will be there for you. I saw people support each other emotionally and professionally. I witnessed people give one another ideas that kept their business alive and thriving. Two of the best examples included the furniture re-upholstery shop that became a Covid mask manufacturing company and a brewery that became a Covid hand sanitizer company.
5. I learned that if you wait until tough times are over, your business will be over. During difficult times, you need your network more than ever. Social distancing is the wrong attitude; physical distancing is what was critical. We need to be more social than ever! I saw successful businesses activate their network and not abandon it.

6. I learned that I could travel the world without getting on a plane. I have 2.3 million miles on one airline alone! It was a gift to be able to spend months with my wife at home. It was the longest period of time we had together in our 31 years of marriage. I will forever be thankful for that.
7. Lastly, I learned that friends are more important than ever. The quality of the people in your life (or in your room as I call it in one of my books), will determine the quality of your life.

For me, that last lesson was profound. It was a tough year for me, as it was for many people. But I came out of 2020 with a clearer vision of who my friends are and who truly cares about me as a person.

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I will forever be grateful for that. So, I suggest that you not completely write off 2020 and erase the year from your memory banks. Instead, consider what you learned from last year. What was something positive that you learned or took away from the most challenging year in recent history? Give some thought to this question and write down your observations. I believe that kind of reflection will help you recognize the good that took place during a tough year.

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