

It's going to be different

AS WE EMERGE FROM THIS YEAR-LONG WINTER of discontent, tragedy, and uncertainty, and as work begins to materialize and we slowly return to gainful employment, there are a few realities we must face. We are not the same people we were a year ago. The industry has shifted and will feel unfamiliar. Our enthusiasm for returning to the lifestyle we were accustomed to will be tempered by the copious amount of “free time” we have experienced which we must now concede in favor of much needed income.

Through the course of the pandemic, we have all experienced loss; everyone has been touched by this disease. At best those infected quarantined and suffered the loss of what little social contact they had. Many experienced severe symptoms that laid them low for weeks and from which recovery has been slow and uncertain. Most of us know someone among the more than half a million individuals who lost their lives to COVID-19. These experiences have changed us.

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Other elements related to the pandemic have affected us as well. Many things have weighed heavy on us; separation from loved ones; social constrictions; uncertainty about the advancement of the disease; feelings of helplessness. These aspects have led to dramatic consequences such as depression and a rise of suicide in our industry. Suicidal behaviors are often related to amplified feelings of loneliness, depression, and anger. All of us have experienced one or more of these things in the last year.

Many have struggled with the loss of health coverage. With no income it has been difficult to find replacement coverage. As a consequence, many are without health insurance, exacerbating their anxiety about COVID-19 and overall stress.

Our lack of work has also led to a loss of community. Due to the nature of our work, our coworkers are often the center of our community and give us a sense of belonging. This loss has compounded our sense of isolation and loneliness. We are not the same people we were a year ago. As we return to work, we will need to be aware that we have all changed and the community we rebuild will reflect those changes.

Our industry has changed as well. Companies have disappeared or shrunk to mere shadows of their former selves. Many workers

have left the industry to find what income they could. I wonder how many of those will return. Those who have been fortunate to find work in the industry—film and television primarily—have had to adapt many of the skills they spent years honing, in order to follow the COVID-19 protocols designed to try to keep them safe. These changes have compounded already high stress levels causing some workers to “act out,” threatening continued work. Fortunately, those have been few, and infections have been rare. When we return to work, we have to expect that it will not be the same as when we left. How we react is up to us.

The industry has changed. We have changed too. We are not the people we were a year ago.

As things open up, we will all have to face the reality that our perspective has changed. The lifestyle we had become used to in our years of working is different than the one we've been living. We have seen more of the same people in the past year than we ever have. I'm sure some families will be happy to see their mostly-at-work loved ones of the past return to that *modus operandi*, but I'll bet more will not. Having us around 24/7 has undoubtedly been good for most families, particularly when there are kids trying to learn remotely. Having your partner there at dinner time every night has been a welcome change for most. Indeed, some of us have become the primary cooks for our households. That too will be missed. As we prepare to return to work, take a moment and reflect on how that return will affect the time we all seem to have too much of right now. Are you ready for that change?

Our industries' return to work will be celebrated. It's been a dynamically difficult year in many ways. For many, getting back to work will begin a healing process. As we return, we must accept and embrace the changes we will face. Hopefully we can do so with patience, positivity, compassion, and kindness. We have come so far and hopefully learned so much. Let's take those lessons with us as this long winter slowly thaws into a spring and summer of warmth and bounty. ■



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