

## The hidden lessons of coronavirus

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If I read all the messages I receive each day concerning the coronavirus, if I listen to all the gossip and insinuations some sources are spewing out, I see the danger of panic spreading and I feel fear rise up in me. Fear for my family, my children, my wife, my 80-year-old mother, my parents-in-law (aged 82 and 83), my friends, my neighbours, my customers, myself.

At this point, I say STOP. I get a grip on myself, I apply my mind and consider the situation from another point of view. I try to uncover the **hidden messages** of the coronavirus.

What lessons can we learn from the present situation, as it affects us more or less directly?

Yes, the situation is delicate, critical.

Yes, it has to be taken very seriously.

Yes, we need to be careful.

Yes, the financial consequences will be, and in many cases already are, disastrous for individuals and businesses. As you can imagine, my business is also directly affected, and this is true for most of you too.

In particular, our hearts go out to health service personnel, at all levels. In some regions and countries they are having to cope with exceptionally difficult circumstances. We must do all we can to help and avoid overloading them. Panic and hysteria are counter-productive.

Let's keep a cool head and find new solutions. Let's change the way we look at things.

This brings me to six essential lessons which, whether we like it or not, are reasserting themselves in daily life. Whether you are at home with your family, at work with your colleagues or employees, or with friends, these lessons will take on a new relevance.

### Lesson number 1: **Taking time out**

In a constantly changing world, where everything is accelerating and becoming more and more complex, we are often caught up in the rush, unable to break free. Like a hamster in its wheel, we go round and round at top speed.

How often, in my training courses, do I stress the need to take time out? Even if it's only 10 minutes, for oneself or for someone else. The slowdown brought about by the closure of shops, restaurants and recreational spaces allows us to take some time for ourselves. For some people, this will be a welcome opportunity, for others a new experience. They may feel lost at first. It is our task to encourage and give them guidance, to savour this new taste.

### Lesson number 2: **Becoming more aware**

Situations of this kind make us think. They make us think about our way of life, the way we consume, the way we communicate. Since the coronavirus crisis began, I have had more conversations with my children. On the one hand, they are fed up of 80% of our conversations being driven by this topic, but the fact is that we have talked more. A situation like this brings people together and encourages sharing. The resulting discussion is of a deeper kind, as we share our fears, thoughts and values. Social media are obviously very much present,

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mobile phones a key means of communication. Nevertheless, we are spending more time talking. Especially since we are often together in the same room.

### Lesson number 3: **Re-establishing respect through social distancing**

One of the most effective measures for counteracting an epidemic is to keep a safe distance from people who are at risk – “social distancing”, as it is called. In the case of the coronavirus, this means people aged over 65 or who have existing health conditions.

As I see it, introducing this social distancing rule has helped to re-establish respect. Young people of course understand this rule and abide by it; in so doing, they are showing respect for their elders and vice-versa. I think the idea of “reverse mentoring” is an excellent one. Indeed, a young person can learn from a senior citizen and vice-versa. I see this in the relationship between my children and their grandparents (from German-speaking Switzerland and Italy). The reason for this distancing is first of all to protect others. I also see it as a mark of respect.

Being of Italian origin, I tend to be rather tactile and physically affectionate, and I have had to learn to keep my distance. But this does not mean being emotionally distant! One can be very close in terms of energy and respect, while keeping a certain distance. By setting a good example in this regard, I can show another person how important they are to me, whether it's my wife, my children, my mother or my customers.

### Lesson number 4: **Discipline**

One of the trends I observe among the businesses I support and in my private life with my children and friends is a loss of discipline.

The situation brought about by the virus forces us to return to a stricter discipline, in our contacts, travel and interaction, as well as where hygiene is concerned.

Learning how to wash our hands again is a good example. Circumstances are forcing us to do so. Here again, I don't need to insist. There are posters and videos everywhere, and some of my friends send me funny clips that reinforce these good habits. Personally, I have drawn a flip-chart page for my seminars illustrating these rules. I am noticing that everyone around me is putting them into practice. Discipline is restored.

### Lesson number 5: **Small groups (family)**

Having to avoid large-scale events and large gatherings is also very positive in my opinion. It restores the importance of small groups of between three and eight people (family-size groups, as I often say). During this difficult period, I have decided to organize training courses only with small groups in large rooms, with sufficient space to ensure the necessary “social distancing”. The rules are clearly defined:

- Greetings by gesture (hands together at chest level and bow towards the other person, like our Asian friends do)
- Hand-washing (hand sanitizer available in the room)
- Disinfected equipment (chairs, tables, folders)
- 2 metres between people, as per current guidelines
- Parking spaces available
- And so on, as necessary

In small groups, discussion is more intense, the participants benefit more, and we can go into greater detail where individual needs are concerned. It also fosters team spirit. The sense of cohesion gives strength and energy to the group. As in a close-knit family, where the members support and help one another.

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This brings us to the final lesson we can learn.

Lesson number 6: **Solidarity, the strength of partnership**

From time immemorial, when crises arise, human beings have always helped one another. And this is precisely the thing that lends us integrity and humanity. Look around you and you will see that in recent years people have become increasingly isolated. This is true of the elderly, company bosses, your colleagues, your friends, maybe you yourself: loneliness is one of the diseases of modern society. Far from being the solution to this problem, social media and our mobile phones can exacerbate it.

Facing a crisis that is unprecedented for many of us, solidarity and mutual support are the qualities that will enable us to overcome it. The strength of partnership and solidarity enhances our humanity and sense of kinship. Only together can we overcome all the difficulties. You can count on me, as can my wife, my children, my mother, my family, my friends and my clients.

Let's take my mother, aged 80, as an example. This situation and the constraints it imposes could have the effect of further increasing her isolation. She is no longer supposed to travel on public transport, go to the shops and so on. My children are running errands for her and will deliver things to her home. While keeping a social distance (respect), they spend a little time with her. I go and see her regularly, to have a coffee and a chat. Yesterday we went together (by car) to visit my father's grave, then she went home on foot (45 minutes' walk). On arrival she sent me a text message to say she was safe and sound. Let's do this sort of thing for our relatives, and also for our friends. This situation should not be allowed to isolate us from one another, but rather unite us, strengthen us, foster solidarity.

The same is true where our customers are concerned. Provided we keep the necessary social distance and observe the rules, we can find new ways of having discussions, developing our projects, doing our work.

And to conclude, an idea for the next time you go out for a **breath of fresh air**:

why not take a walk in the woods with a friend or a relative? Take your time. Fresh air is good for you. As you walk, observe the verges and, if you come across any rubbish (plastic or other litter), pick it up. You will be doing good for society and helping to make the world a better place. Before going out, you might prepare one or more seed "bombs" (balls of earth containing the seeds of different plants). When you come to a suitable spot, take them out of your bag and drop them into the environment, making your own special contribution to biodiversity. The resulting flowers and colours will enrich the experience of future walkers.

Friendly greetings, and may you stay healthy!

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