



Living in Uncertain Times

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As part of my work for Hospice of Santa Barbara, I was asked to brainstorm three or four topics that I thought would be important for our community as we plod through this time of uncertainty with the Coronavirus experience. From a medical perspective and when watching the local and national news, the focus is on the very important key preventive measures to flatten the curve and stop the spread of the virus: Maintain social distancing, handwashing and proper hygiene; use of personal protective equipment (PPE) – gloves, masks, face shields and avoid touching eyes, nose, mouth with unwashed hands, etc.

Now that we are in the second month of physical distancing, working from home, and seeing businesses close, I quickly thought about the need for giving and receiving reassurance during this time of uncertainty. I think that many of us, despite being self-assured, competent people who live and work with a “can do” attitude, all are in need of a bit of reassurance – that means you and me!

When bad things happen to good people, how can we take those lessons and learn from them? Well, the only thing that can follow things falling apart, is things coming back together again. But there is a lot that happens in between those two bookends. I would like to suggest that each of us has the opportunity to demonstrate reassurance – yes, even at distance.

1. ***Be a “role model”*** for dealing with uncertainty by taking life one day or maybe an hour or a minute at a time. By doing that, we show through modeling, that we are doing what we can to manage that which is under our control. Look for the positive experience of today. For example, I am now paying more attention to the birds singing outside my window and the graceful hawk that cruises by my house several times a day. I found myself talking about that with a friend just the other day! I am learning to appreciate the present moment.

2. **Foster connection and set a positive emotional tone** – reach out and (virtually) touch someone today. Make a call to someone you care about, just to check in. Take a meal to a senior who can't get out or has health issues. Write a note (paper and pen) and send it to someone. Send out a fun e-mail (and I get tons of them each week) – I forward the memorable ones! These are powerful ways of staying connected! Send a text with a photo – I received quite a number of these on Easter Sunday. **ASK** how you can be of support to someone who is alone or ailing! This is reassurance in action by truly connecting from the heart!

3. **Build resilience!** Become inventive! Learn new technology! Just five weeks ago, I learned about ZOOM and now, I am on it 5-10 times a week for meetings, practice sessions and even once with my family back East --- now that is a miracle, for sure! The beauty of this technology is that it is also fostering connection because we can both see and hear the person/s just as though they are in the room with us --- and they are, by means of technology! What a great experience and I doubt that I would have chosen to experiment with ZOOM on my own! Thank you, Hospice of Santa Barbara.

4. **Remain calm, show compassion, demonstrate courage.** Honestly, there are so many ways to do this that are now surfacing. Several weeks ago, a dear lady was celebrating her 89th birthday and was going to be alone, since she now lives in Assisted Living, and all of those communities have not been allowing visitors, for safety reasons. This sweet elderly woman had been having no less than two to four visitors every day prior to Covid-19 and the thought of her being alone on her birthday was unimaginable. So, I contacted the Administrator and we did some creative problem-solving. Four of us visited (all in PPE) and stood outside the slider- more than six feet away from her (luckily she had access to the outside), sang Happy Birthday and presented the birthday lady (thanks to the Administrator) with her favorite chocolate cake. It took courage to make the request, a little creativity for access and it showed a whole lot of love and compassion. Reassurance in action – a gift from the administrator to her resident and a gift to us, her friends.

5. **Live well, Laugh Often, Love Much!** That is a sign that I have above my desk in my home office. I do think we demonstrate reassurance to others by how we live. Sure, the Covid-19 experience has forced us to create a physical distancing from others, but we can and should take care of ourselves in the process. Live, Laugh, Love must be more than a sign and new mantra. It needs to be a way of life!

I am seeing so many more people out walking – hoorah for enjoying beautiful Santa Barbara and doing so safely. That is living well! Some of the crazy YouTube videos have had me almost falling off my chair in laughter – something that before now, I would most likely not have opened up because “I don't have time for that.” Now, those crazy videos are lifting me up. And last, but should be first LOVE must be what drives our

action with everyone, not just our family and friends, but everyone yesterday, today and tomorrow.

“Reassurance: to comfort, console, provide assurance, to lift up.” This is the dictionary definition, but I have shared my vision of the “real life” version.

“All the beautiful sentiments in the world weigh less than a single lovely action.”

James Russell Lowell