

Distanced but not Disconnected

By Steve Aduddell, Leadership Coach

Our world has changed. I live in Oklahoma City and was watching as the Thunder prepared to tip off against the Utah Jazz that Wednesday night only a little over a month ago. As the players took their place around the logo at center court like any other game, it all came to a *full stop*. That was the tipping point.

The next day as my wife and I were in the stands anticipating the beginning of a Women's College Basketball conference tournament and the start of March Madness, the game got cancelled. All of College Basketball and NCAA sports followed.

Our way of doing life together may never be the same. Our culture, dominated by social events, gatherings, festivals, celebrations and certainly competitive sporting events, will undoubtedly look different going forward.

So, how do we respond as we all walk through this together? Several things are becoming evident as we navigate through the pandemic together.

- 1) Distancing is new and necessary.
 - a. We have been ordered to shelter at home, isolate or stay at least six feet apart if we must go out.
 - b. Our social gatherings are all but shut down. Our competitive sports are nowhere to be found. We have turned to re-runs just for a fix, even though we know the outcome.
 - c. Our schools are teaching online and teachers are struggling with the technology learning curve and lesson preparation and presentation.
 - d. Parents are thrown into difficult teaching and learning situations all while trying to maintain some sense of order in the middle of chaos.
- 2) Disrupted creativity is on full display.
 - a. People are innovatively working with their kids, using 3D printers at home to manufacture plastic protective shields.
 - b. Factories are re-deploying manufacturing assembly lines to build ventilators and respirators as well as PPE.
 - c. New and strange inventions, and courage, are blossoming. It is interesting that when we are not constrained by "*the way things have always been done*", crazy thoughts become ideas that birth solutions and implementation at light speed.
- 3) Collaboration has become the norm.
 - a. Online music Zoom choirs from all demographics seem to spring out of nowhere, but really everywhere. The harmony is as beautiful as the smiles.
 - b. People are working together to find ways to deliver food or a helping hand to those who need it.
 - c. Companies are pooling resources to make and deliver PPE.
 - d. Entertainers are engaging in distance collaboration to share hope.

- e. Songs of inspiration and thanks are born, and their messages spread daily.
 - f. Right and left, along with every ethnicity, are actually collaborating, contributing and working together for a cause, for good.
- 4) Caring for others has become a common thread.
- a. Everywhere you turn you see individuals looking for ways to care for a stranger.
 - b. Families meeting outside windows to share a smile with elderly residents.
 - c. Sheltered people across the world lean out of windows in unison to salute the courage, bravery and resolve of health care workers and first responders, demonstrating that people really do care and really do take action.
 - d. Young and old alike pick up groceries for those who can't.
 - e. Encouraging notes and thoughtful gifts are being delivered to the shut-ins.
- 5) Connection will not be denied.
- a. Families strolling leisurely in their neighborhoods as they smile and talk to those passing six feet apart. The unity is understood and welcomed.
 - b. Church services worldwide are connecting over the internet and hundreds of millions of people are praying and worshipping from their couches weekly.
 - c. Friends of all ages calling or Zooming others on a consistent, weekly basis just to hear their voices. Acquaintances are becoming friends.
 - d. Families checking in on each other more than ever. I know. We have a Family Love Zoom Call scheduled every week. It's on the calendar. We are a close family but are connecting more than ever. Distantly. Purposely. Frequently.
- 6) Distancing cannot contain love.
- a. Love has no boundaries. It's not limited to *"shelter in place"*.
 - b. Love has no limitations or restrictions. Six feet or 60,000 miles apart has no effect on the power of *"love engaged."*
 - c. *"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." 1 Cor. 13*
 - d. I heard the song by Luke Bryan, *Most People are Good*, again yesterday. I feel that this time of mutual crisis reveals *who we really are*. That's worth thinking about.

I'm inspired and intentional in leading myself and others well as we navigate our new world together. We're positioned for greater impact and influence with those around us. We're distanced, but certainly not disconnected. In the song *"Empty Chairs at Empty Tables"* from *Les Misérables*, Marius lamented the loss of friends, reminding us that our undeniable need for human connection is profound. The challenge we all face is in continuing to connect with each other and move forward, aware and intentional in action and change.