

Subject: Week 121 learnings - Loneliness
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Dear All

We have been in lockdown for over a month now. All of us have adjusted to the new normal, working from home, in teams calls, in zoom calls, done things with family etc. etc.

As I've read about the COVID impact on people, I turned to look at loneliness as a concept and learnt a lot. Here's my set of learnings:

1. The first thing about this lockdown is that we are physically distant but socially connected. Our life in most cases has been the other way around. Deep down all human beings crave for social connection, no man/woman is an island.
2. Loneliness is a state of mind. You can be surrounded by people and yet feel lonely. Through my career, I have experienced this in some meetings when your proposal is not accepted and you feel lonely because you don't know what to do in a room full of people who don't understand your loneliness.
3. Being lonely according to a few studies is the equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day and impacts life span by about 26 %.
4. All the people who have argued for work life balance have to re argue what their point of view is. Too much life with some work even if from home is not what most people expected of work life balance!!
5. The part of loneliness that most impacts people is the thought/ feeling that this is against your will. That's why you are seeing the early protests in America which has always celebrated the freedom of individual choice.
6. A January 2020 study in USA said that 60 % of people over 60 feel lonely and 79 % of people in the age bracket 18-22 feel lonely. Both groups are interesting. The older group feels that they have no one to connect with since society doesn't feel they can contribute, while the younger group is digitally connected but physically and emotionally disconnected. In both cases we need support groups to address this perceived loneliness.
7. As I reflect on the lockdown, I thought of people who go through this for longer spells - inmates in a jail. They are locked in for long periods. They track months and seasons by watching the trees and flowers outside the jail. They all get a break to meet others and go back. They celebrate new year and other festivals by banging on their cell walls or bars for thirty minutes and then go back to their routine. Everything is a routine for them food, exercise, smoke breaks etc.
8. Rajat Gupta Ex Mc Kinsey, when confined in a jail read the Gita and gave advice to his jail mates on things related to business and life.
9. Some of the most famous novels have been written in prison. I give you five great examples: a. Letters from a Birmingham Jail by Martin Luther King, b. Don Quixote by Miguel Cervantes, c. Conversations with Myself by Nelson Mandela, d. The Travels of Marco Polo by Rustichello De Pisa (Marco Polo was arrested when he came back from China and told his story to a friend in jail who then published it) and e. De Profundis by Oscar Wilde. It's amazing the creativity of these people when they were locked up.
10. I try and keep in touch with as many people as I can through this period, I also keep a gratitude journal, people I want to thank when this is over, the list is long. I am also planning to finish significant portions of my book by the time this is done.

So, loneliness is a state of mind first, don't go there, keep yourself occupied at all times with positive thoughts and pick up things that take you forward to the next day, the next week and the next month.

Enjoy, wr

Feedback welcome

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