

First and foremost, the sheer novelty of this pandemic is certainly so striking. I think it safe to say that the majority of people living through this time, have quite plainly never experienced anything like this before. It has been a unique experience to say the least; to deal with something that so completely and totally reaches into every aspect of your life. Personally, the overwhelming change stemmed from realizing how everyone's perspective has changed through all of this. From the smallest of errands taking on a new gravity to fighting and rationalizing the potential risk that comes with seeing people outside of your home.

It is mind boggling to look back before going into actual quarantine and seeing how much we have essentially lost: no one would have given a second thought to going to the river, grabbing coffee with a friend, or going to visit an elderly family member just months ago. The sentiment that you don't realize the value of what you have until you've lost it could not be truer, even with the small things; in some ways I think the small things are the real indicators to how much the community and culture have changed. Even after months of this "new normal" as it has been coined by many of my peers, I still find myself struggling to fully commit or accept that this is really how life is now. Like most, I miss the little things: thoughtlessly and casually going to wander or embark on a small adventure in my city, excitement at the people and things I might see, the friendly ones especially. Even that has changed though, the people.

How people have changed! Certain traits that have been manifested or possibly unburied within the strangers of my community. Working in the service industry, I've seen the full spectrum of what the pandemic brings out in people: the ones who believe it to be a hoax and scoff at the enforcement of mask wearing in my store; people who have seen others' health deteriorate before their eyes, the ones who have lost friends and family to the virus; others who, like myself, yearn for the days where you could approach a loved one without unease or a second thought to the possible repercussions; and the folks who go about their day as though nothing has happened, who throw on a mask as nothing more than compliance with frivolous store policy. My eyes certainly see through a new lens, and honestly, it seems to recalibrate day by day. Some days I am genuinely concerned and struck in place at the thought that things will continue this way for well over another year. Then the other side of me very much sympathizes with those who are just tired of being shut in; of not being "allowed" to do something by this invisible killer that sometimes feels more like a tyrannous parent at times; so weary of having to second guess and reconsider every single thing you do from the moment you leave your house.

Then being in public is an entirely different experience. My first grocery store experience once quarantine had been declared was unsettling. It was such a foreign feeling to see the fear in people's eyes as you slowly stroll down the aisles, making certain to keep your distance. It was quieter. People seemed genuinely afraid of each other. None of it sat right with me; I couldn't wrap my head around the energy over the whole store. And not to mention the shortage of various household items- I've yet to see two canisters of disinfectant wipes next to each other since this all began.

Then the mind, taking on a new complex system of rationalizing and reprioritizing everyday decisions and situations. It seems some days I'm able to talk myself into believing that this cup of coffee, this hour with a friend- someone who I don't possibly know the whereabouts of previous to our meeting, is so necessary. Essential to my sanity, my soul, my well being in the midst of uncertainty and never ending chaos. There is so much going on in the world, and here I sit, so privileged to *just write* about it. To merely ponder and sit in awe. We make allowances for the people and things we love, whatever it takes to create a small portion of peace for ourselves and our family. Social media has never been so fired up. A constant onslaught of information and news of never ending tragedies around the country, around the globe. It seems to come in waves, with another population keeping a slower, steady stream of reminders and calls to action. The challenges of those less fortunate get thrown in your face while being reminded that not all struggles resemble one another.

It is just shocking how abruptly life has changed in a relatively short amount of time. It seems like everyday is reevaluating, am I doing enough? Is there really more that could be done? Where do I pour my efforts and resources?

Another thing that has monumentally changed is how people practice their religion. Personally, I miss meeting at church for services and having that like-minded community that pushes and reminds you to strive for better. I really do believe that church isn't the building, but it has been very eye opening to see how much I, and others, valued that building. It's quite the test, putting your beliefs to action and having a greater collection of people ready to scrutinize everything you do and don't do, what posts you're sharing and which ones get lost in the socially distanced escapes and brunches. There's always a need. Yours, and your need to see someone outside your household. The people who have been left penniless and without support from any place or organization. Our global neighbors, ravished by natural disasters and the harshest offences of other humans.

Though I could go on much more, I will touch on a final thought; the question of *when*, how much longer will we be living this way? I wonder this, as do many of my customers and peers at work, my family. It's one thing to trudge through something with a deadline to look forward to, a promise of relief in the future. Yet a whole other to pine over a "normal" that very well may never return. The answers to some of our questions now only bring about a whole slew of new ones. It is so easy to sit and ponder the way of life we've lost as a nation, as a world, and even with all the progress, the new hopes, there seems to be no answer that satisfies everyone. I suppose we can push through, looking to the day that we may read about this time, in another time.