The COVID-19 Portal by Cheryl Scanlan

We have just gone through the COVID-19 Portal that has transported us with lightning speed into a new world.

When you read that statement, where does your heart settle? Does it pine longingly for the days gone by? Are you looking forward to the return of normal? The interesting thing about the COVID-19 Portal, is that it’s a one-way portal. It is a phenomenon that has shifted your business, your community and the world. It seems that we are left without an anchor to anything we knew before. Additionally, the environment is very unstable for all of us world-wide.

* It is the first time in the history of recorded pandemics that government agencies are isolating those who are not sick.
* Each county and state has the authority to create their own reentry plans, creating discombobulated management policy updates for businesses.
* The government can’t seem to keep up with its own changes, even sending stimulus checks to people who are deceased while revamping the PPP forgiveness guidelines six times since this writing.
* Conspiracy theories abound and business owners must decide how much to pay attention to them as fact or fiction as they try to forecast.
* We operate with the continual threat of the COVID-19 curve spiking again wreaking further havoc on businesses just as each tries to figure out reentry and yes, survival.
* Businesses are making subtle and sometimes, significant pivots in business models, even retooling manufacturing lines to respond to the pandemic.

**A New Kind of Pandemic**

This is a pandemic of a new kind, one that we are learning about and experiencing in real time.

This may be the first time in our history that many business owners and leaders all around the world are experiencing very similar global market challenges. Who would have thought that after 30 years in business, an executive would find himself/herself asking "what do I do now?" The challenge exists for every business owner and involves significant adaptation for most, if not all. For those who are less affected – how do I minister?  For those who are more affected – how do I keep my business afloat?

What questions are you asking yourself right now? What questions are you asking the Lord? What questions are lodged deep in your heart with no words to express them?

While we may be experiencing this for the first time, it is not the first time that a whole nation of people has gone through a life-changing portal and did not know what to expect on the other side. Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt even though the uncertainty they experienced during the journey caused them to long for a land they once knew so well. However, they were never going to return to Egypt again. It was Moses’s job to lead them out during this exodus. However, it was Joshua’s job to lead them into the promise land for the next phase of the journey. They did not know what a promise looked like in this new land. They did not know what the new territory looked like. They had no idea about the boundaries or even how to occupy the new land. They had to rely one hundred percent on God to give them instruction on how to live in a place they had never been before, a place they ended up after they went through the Exodus Portal (the book of Exodus plus see Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy). Similarly, that is where we are now. We have gone through the COVID-19 Portal and there is no going back. We have no real idea what to expect.

**The New Normal**

What does the new normal look like? That is an elusive answer because in many cases the new normal does not exist yet. It is being created one step at a time, one moment at a time.

You may be asking, "but what do we DO now?" First, realize that you are a person going through this, not a machine. You will feel things, long for things and even be confused by things. That is a part of what it means to be human. As we begin the reentry process, may I recommend you set aside 2-3 hours to do the following?

* Give yourself time to grieve –  to process the deep sorrow from loss. I cannot think of one person who has not been touched by loss in some way. Some have lost family members and people they care for, while others have lost business and recreational activities that were important to them plus the ability to be with people for important events. As I write this, my neighbor lost her husband to a grave illness and cannot provide a proper burial for the family to grieve together. For those of you hit harder by this, please give yourself permission to grieve the losses so you can be free of bitterness or resentment taking root in your heart.
* Consider the blessings that have been revealed in this time; time with family, time with the Lord, time to slow down and catch your breath. The blessings will be different for each person. Ask the Lord how He might want to reveal blessings to you for your work and life. A perspective sprinkled with gratitude for the basic or simple things in life can help balance our souls during this season.
* Recognize opportunities. During this pandemic there are opportunities, but we may miss them if we are not looking for them. Taking advantage of an opportunity does not mean that someone else suffers. It means that in the middle of much suffering, there is grace for a new way.
* Define your new normal. In the waiting, explore what the new normal will look like for you. How will you embrace it? How will you prepare for it?
* Hold your own plans loosely, realizing that we are not in control. There is deep peace in placing your current circumstances and future in Christ. Maybe someday, I’ll write about how the Lord taught me to live a "Lord willing" life, even in the midst of running three companies.
* For a while, focus on more tactical goals rather than strategic goals. As things unfold you will not have the benefit of knowing what is going to happen long term, but you can make very specific and time sensitive decisions based on what is happening right now.

**God is Unchanging Amidst World-wide Change**

Here is what you can count on:

* God’s faithfulness. Psalm 89:8 Who is like you, Lord God Almighty? You, Lord, are mighty, and your faithfulness surrounds you.
* The promise that God is with us. Psalm 119:148 My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.
* God’s true Word. With so much information flowing around, who do you believe? The only one we can truly believe is God and His Word. Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and full of power [making it operative, energizing, and effective]. It is sharper than any two-edged [a]sword, penetrating as far as the division of the [b]soul and spirit [the completeness of a person], and of both joints and marrow [the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and judging the very thoughts and intentions of the heart.
* The promise that He works things for our good. Romans 8:28 And we know [with great confidence] that God [who is deeply concerned about us] causes all things to work together [as a plan] for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His plan and purpose.
* Just as Joshua led the children of Israel into a land they had never been before after travelling through the world-changing Exodus Portal, we have gone through a world-changing COVID-19 Portal into a land we have never been before. And, just as the Lord told Joshua again and again, their success depended on one thing - the promise that He was with them. Not by their own strength, but on His abiding presence. He was with them before the Exodus Portal and after they travelled through that portal. God’s faithfulness was their promise and it is our promise from Him today and always (Numbers 13 and 14).

About Cheryl Scanlan

Cheryl Scanlan, MCC, CMCC, BCC is president of C3Advantage. She has worked with CEOs that are in Fortune 100 through next generation small business owners. Having also run a multi-million dollar firm in New York, Cheryl knows the importance of business goals and the impact of teams. Cheryl's thought partnering method helps leaders see clearly what is fuzzy, articulate what is currently unintelligible, and generate coherent & executable strategy.

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