

Pandemic Behavior Revelations

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Zach Shulman teaches at the Johnson School at Cornell University, and is the Director of Entrepreneurship@Cornell. He is also a partner in Cayuga Venture Fund, a locally based venture capital organization. Their office is across the hall from The Computing Center at the Cornell Business and Technology Park. We're used to seeing Zach regularly, but with the pandemic, we haven't seen him and many others for much of the past year. Here are some of his views on behaviour revelations he has gained during the pandemic. For more thoughts from Zach on entrepreneurialship and VCs, visit: ithacavc.com/

The pandemic has been tough on many people. I would like you to fill in your own definition of "tough" as the range of impact is really wide and I am definitely not qualified to define it for you. Even for people who question the pandemic or are anti-vaccine, the pandemic has been tough (again, define it yourself). For clarity, I clearly consider the pandemic to be just that - a pandemic - and I received my first dose of Moderna the other day.

Reflecting on the impact for me, I have noticed a few personal behavior revelations that I thought I would share. I typically don't post personal "stuff", but I am making an exception because I thought it was interesting how the pandemic has impacted some of my work behaviors:

I don't mind the relative isolation. I consider myself to be pretty extroverted. I used to like going to the gym to see familiar faces and having small talk with my gym friends. I have not been to the gym since about March 15, 2020. And I actually don't think I miss it. And while I do miss my work team members, I also have no problem working from home and only seeing my colleagues on Zoom. It is easier, more efficient, and for me more productive, at least for now. Don't get me wrong, when Cornell says "ok to come back" to the office for the general employee population, I will be heading back, but I bet I have many more days of working from home even once that happens.

My tolerance for inefficiency has gone down even more. I say "even more" because my tolerance for inefficiency was pretty low already. This is a tricky problem, and sometimes it impacts the way I interact with my team. It is easier for me to be even more direct over Zoom (and my directness is not always well received). I had a team member the other day tell me "you think everything only takes 5 minutes!" The staff person has a good point - good learning moment for me. I will say that the lack of in person communication makes

crystal clear email writing that much more important. When I read vague emails it can drive me a bit nuts. I have found myself calling out others when this happens, and sometimes not in a nice way! I need to better check my reactions and realize that just because I cannot see someone after an interaction (because we are not in the office together) it does not mean that the impact of a snarky comment won't linger!

The pandemic has made most of us realize a few things about ourselves. Some good, some not so good, some bad. My personal reflection: Be aware and willing to change.