


Substantial Disruption



Cough If You've Heard This Before

By Mike Tully

Every mid-winter without fail, I come down with a cold. It's what I do instead of Lent. No big deal: a runny nose, bad attitude, body aches, maybe a cough. On rare occasions, a slight fever. But, really, just a few days of discomfort, ibuprofen, hot tea with brandy, and quality time just hanging out in bed – with my wife and dog if I'm lucky and they're feeling lucky. But this time, unlike in years past, I reassure myself by noting that, while I might be miserable, gloomy, and doomy, at least I don't have the *PLAGUE!*

Or a job. Thanks to my half century of participation in the workforce and contributions to Social Security and the Arizona State Retirement System, I am gainfully unemployed. I am not required to get up early, shower, slam down a breakfast drink and plunge into a workplace rampant with all manner of toxicities. Long before a happy new virus that sounds like a looney Trump tweet (“covfefe” and “COVID-19”: coincidence?) began rampaging through the 21st century like Godzilla with a hangover, I was already avoiding door knobs and elevator buttons. I would wait for somebody else to open a door and quickly slip in behind them without touching the gummy hardware. I held my breath in elevators. I ate alone to avoid contact with fellow humans. Or maybe it was the other way around. Either way it was safe and I never contracted the *PLAGUE!*

Retirement is a rolling containment zone. Lunch in retirement is not like lunch in the workforce. When I worked, I lunched alongside other people who worked, all of us cramming our lunch opportunity into whatever time window our bosses gave us, never able to relax because we had just left the workplace and would shortly go back. I spent my lunch hour catching up on the paper and carefully avoiding spilling anything on my shirt. Even business casual attire draws the line at food stains. In retirement, my shirt looks like a Jackson Pollock and I don't care. With the flexibility afforded by retirement, we usually have lunch outside the normal hours, after the wage slaves have returned to their respective plantations. The after-hours lunch crowd is sparser and grayer. Social distancing? Long before the *caramba!* virus provoked warnings to maintain six feet of separation, we retirees were already doing it. At-risk population? Welcome to our reality. Look around the late lunch hour and you'll see a bunch of widely scattered old folks, dutifully marinating their hands in an alcohol solution. We already know to be careful. We already knew a crowded place riddled with contagious humans is No Country for Old Farts. We don't need to be reminded by the *PLAGUE!*

By the way, I just saw you touch your face. Stop that. It's against the new order. You need to recalibrate your relationship with your face and never, ever touch it. Think of every face as a potential “Me Too” complainant. Unless, of course, you're a beautician, in which case you need to wear gloves. And a face mask. And constantly sanitize everything you touch with an alcohol solution. And, to help you keep sane while treating clients like plutonium, consider taking some alcohol solution internally. You know, just in case, to ward off the *PLAGUE!*

As I write this it's just been announced that the NCAA Division 1 Basketball Championships will be [played in virtually empty arenas](#). The only people allowed inside the game venues will be a scattering of coaches, staff and family members. Years ago, several of us camped overnight outside McKale Center with a couple thousand of our best friends, hoping for a good place in line for Bob Dylan concert tickets that went on sale the next morning. (Don't ask; that's a whole other column.) In the wee hours, my friend KG and I needed to use the restroom. Fortunately, the kind folks at University of Arizona Facilities Management left the doors to McKale unlocked so the restrooms would be available to the large crowd spending the night outside. We walked into the large, empty arena and found it to be an eerie experience. There was a low, rumbling noise from the HVAC system and the sound of our steps echoing in the cavernous space. Will that be the new, COVID-19 inspired soundtrack for our beloved annual national basketball festival? Dribble-dribble-dribble rumble, echo, repeat? Now, there's a compelling gameday atmosphere!

Meantime, while the NCAA is announcing games to be played in empty arenas in order to discourage the spread of the virus, while the NBA has suspended its season until further notice, while schools are closing or going online, while airlines are cancelling flights, and concerts and festivals all across the country are being cancelled, guess what? President Trump threatened to [continue holding political rallies](#). I just heard that he backed down and cancelled a couple of them, but Trump lives for his adoring devotees, so who knows how long he can hold off? The Germophobe in Chief nearly became the Super Spreader in Chief, but fear not. His spokesperson assured Fox Business Network's Stuart Varney that the President is "[the best authority on this issue](#)." Are you convinced that Trump is the "best authority" on the *PLAGUE*?

Talk about March Madness.