



THE MESSY MIDDLE

There is something so hopeful about the start of a new year. It is a clean slate, a do-over. As with the start of any other new year, I went through the motions of shutting down last year. I took down the Christmas decorations and tossed the remaining seasonal treats. I may have rushed a bit. Like most of us, I really wanted 2020 to be over. Then I went through my January 1st rituals. I broke out the 2021 calendar and cracked open the brand-new journal. I committed to several goals. Learning to play pickleball is the only one that feels like it will be a quick win. The rest will require project management.

Ever since I began my professional career, I have been drawn to project work. It's rarely boring. There is the excitement of the beginning -- the novelty of different facts, circumstances, and players. Then, fast forward to the satisfaction of its completion.

In between those bookends of excitement and satisfaction is what Scott Belsky calls "The Messy Middle". That is where the real work happens and how I spend most of my consulting hours—guiding companies and individuals through the messy middle.

The messy middle starts with keeping a compelling motivator top of mind. The motivator itself doesn't particularly matter as long as it is compelling to you. For example, I quit smoking because I wanted to become an accountant. Quitting smoking with becoming an accountant in mind was compelling to me but probably would not have been to anyone else in my graduate business program. Nor would it be the least bit persuasive to me today. But it worked very well back then, and I continue to be tobacco free decades later. My current compelling motivator is to get the heck out of the house.

The second step is to collect alternative strategies for when you encounter an obstacle – and you will. The road to success is rarely a straight climb. In fact, if you have been paying attention to the graphs of the COVID-19 statistics, they illustrate the messy middle very well-- full of peaks and valleys. In the case of COVID-19, peaks indicate spread and valleys indicate control. We had our highest peaks initially when we were unaware of how the virus spreads. Masks, closure of non-essential businesses, and work and school shifted to virtual environments all contributed to the ensuing valleys. Current peaks are attributed to holiday-related travel and colder weather sending people into closer proximity indoors. We all will be watching the graphs with the hope that the vaccines bring us back into the valleys of control and eventually to herd immunity. But right now, we are still squarely in the messy middle. After nine months of near constant worry and lock down have you relaxed your personal practices?

In a new year, we would typically be looking to invest in behaviors that would benefit us in the long term. Since we are still squarely in the messy middle of this pandemic, instead of investing in another magic bullet that promises whatever quick hit your diet or fitness program requires, could you commit to doing your part to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

The Harvard Medical School suggests the following 10 behaviors to prevent the spread of COVID-19 as well as other coronaviruses and influenza:

1. Wear a face mask.
2. Maintain at least six feet of distance between you and others.
3. Avoid large gatherings.
4. Socialize outdoors.
5. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
6. Minimize touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
7. Stay home when you are sick.
8. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then dispose of it in the trash.
9. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces regularly.
10. Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.

I just ordered a fresh supply of masks from Amazon. What are you going to do to help us all get out of the messy middle and more importantly to get me the heck out of my house?



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Patricia M. Fuller has dedicated the last 20+ years to designing and delivering wellness programs. Her events earn consistently excellent ratings for her holistic approach and her real world application.

Prior to concentrating in wellness, Pat taught accounting and auditing as an adjunct professor at the University of Tampa. She earned her CPA designation in 1992 as a senior associate for Coopers & Lybrand. She has a Masters in Business Administration from the University of Utah.

Pat has a PhD in holistic nutrition. In 2010, she was board certified by the Holistic Nutrition Credentialing Board. Her areas of research include stress management and eating habits. She is a Certified Wellcoach and a member of the Institute of Coaching. She is an annual attendee to The Harvard Medical School Conference, Coaching In Leadership & Healthcare.

Have a Question? Email it to Dr. Pat: pfuller@bks-partners.com

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