Faculty Thoughts: Gary Boehm

We currently find ourselves in tremendously unusual times. Times that challenge us in varied ways. In addition to the very real risk of COVID-19 infection, adverse health sequelae, widespread loss of jobs/economic stability, the tremendously serious hit to world economies and even our best-laid personal plans, we also find our country and world in political and social turmoil. To add to all of the obvious disruption and stress, we are also experiencing two things that have been shown in many studies to exacerbate stress: a perceived lack of predictability and a lack of control. We have no idea when all of this will end, and may sometimes struggle not to feel helpless in the wake of this confluence of difficulty circumstances. Some key questions for us right now, include how we should best utilize this time, and how we best proceed and progress during this difficult time? Many of you already know of how Sir Isaac Newton (before he was knighted), as an undergraduate student at Cambridge, was sent home from College due to the pandemic of his time, where he spent more than a year away. Disappointing to him for sure (!), but, not only did he use his time wisely and thrive, he did some of his very best work during that time (later called his “year of wonders”), work that profoundly changed the world. While we may not hope for the same level of achievement, why not take the same approach? And as things eventually get back to normal, now is a wonderful time for us to build gratitude for things we previously took for granted and we are offered a chance to think deeply about maybe how some things -both with ourselves and our society- shouldn’t get “back to normal”. Maybe we can make things better than they were. Maybe we can, like Newton, find ways to make lemonade from the unwanted heap of lemons dumped on our collective doorstep.

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