

# Hindsight...

*Our favorite blog posts from 2020*



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# introduction

Dear Reader,

Welcome to our eBook.

Throughout this past year, my colleagues have taken turns posting on the FEI [blog](#). This includes our CEO, COO, account managers, EAP counselors and others.

By reading their posts, you'll gain a deeper understanding of who we are and what we do—from a variety of perspectives.

But despite our various titles and responsibilities, everyone here shares a common goal: We want to help organizations, their employees and dependents find the support they need to overcome challenges and bounce back, stronger than before.

As we look back at last year's challenges, we see how the pandemic and its ensuing hardships revealed our country's painful legacy of racism and systemic injustices. To move forward, we'll have to confront and address these concerns on many levels.

In the meantime, we'd like to help everyone develop a greater understanding of what it means to be resilient.

For too long, resilience has been portrayed as an inner strength that comes from within—that people can achieve resilience on their own, simply by “pulling themselves up by their bootstraps.”

We want to dispel that myth.

At FEI, we believe resilience comes from finding support. Because where there's help, there is hope. And hope is what gives us the inner strength to persevere.

Here's to finding resilience in 2021 and beyond.

From all of us at FEI



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# The Year That Shall Not Be Named

By Ted Uezen, President and CEO

While not an expert on Harry Potter, I have taken the opportunity to borrow a Harry Potter phrase when describing this past year. From here forward, I will only refer to it as “the year that shall not be named.”

Holy cow, is it even possible to begin to describe the craziness, the amount of change, the fear, the pain, the loss?! I could go on, but I think you get the picture.

Personally and professionally, we have all been part of something that just might go down as one of the most challenging years ever. And while there's hope on the horizon, we still face a steady stream of challenges ahead as we end “the year that shall not be named.”

Normally, I challenge folks to take time at the end of a year to run a personal inventory that includes thinking about your family, your career and your business. What are your priorities and goals for the coming year and beyond?

Make sure you're still on track for what you want to achieve and how you want to achieve it. No one else will do this for you. You have to own it. So take the time and put in the energy.

This year is no different. While it's more challenging and maybe you're more exhausted than ever, find the time. In addition, I ask you to think about your team at the office (virtual or otherwise) and what they may need heading into 2021.

One thing we know for certain is that people are stressed beyond belief. With the virtual world and workspace mixing with our physical world and workspace in ways we've never seen before, folks need help and support in ways we never could have imagined.

Parents and family members are now teachers and medical caregivers. Things like healthcare, politics, social unrest and the needs of the workplace have become intertwined in ways unseen since the 1960s. Advocacy and awareness have found a new fervor and energy that has created workspaces and workplaces like never before.

Our teams need help navigating this different environment and dealing with the new normal. “The year that shall not be named” has forced us to think, plan and act differently in 2021 and beyond.

I know there are many things to consider while running your business, and the financial burdens are heavy now. But don't forget about your most important asset—your people. If you haven't already, consider asking your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) partner to help. They can put a plan in place to make sure your team is getting the support they need.

EAPs help strengthen mental health and support the ever-growing work-life challenges, such as childcare. They can also help you develop a workplace wellness plan or provide guidance on financial and legal challenges. They can even be a key training partner for you, expanding

the ways you interact, teach and facilitate learning for your teams, whether online, virtual or in person.

In addition, EAPs can help facilitate discussions on some of today's most pressing topics, such as diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), implicit bias, civility in the workplace or legalizing marijuana.

Facilitating conversations, coaching your managers, building relationships and supporting your team—your EAP is there to help.

Enjoy your holidays and try to smile as we put “the year that shall not be named” behind us and get ready for the adventures ahead in 2021.

I wish you and your family peace, joy and health this holiday season. Happy New Year!



## Pandemic Increases the Need for Couples Counseling

By Elizabeth Lukomski, EAP Counselor

It comes as no surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted marital and romantic relationships. While some couples are finding a renewed sense of closeness and companionship, others are facing tremendous challenges.

As a therapist for FEI Behavioral Health, I know firsthand that many individuals and couples are seeking marital or couples counseling due to the added stresses and tension brought on by COVID-19. Along with the pandemic's health concerns and losses, the need to quarantine has created many addition challenges for couples, including the following:

- Social isolation and loss of support systems
- Lack of privacy and previously used outlets for stress
- Financial hardships
- Stress over medical concerns
- Changes in household and parenting duties
- Disruptions in childcare and children's schooling
- Changes in employment and professional responsibilities
- Spending more time together, often in confined spaces

The pandemic has also exacerbated underlying problems, making it difficult for couples to refrain from being critical or defensive. Legal Templates, a company that provides legal documents, noticed a 34 percent jump in the number of people seeking divorce documents during the first three months after the pandemic's arrival than during the same period last year.

To help reduce the conflict and tension within your relationship, some couples have found the following suggestions helpful.

- Focus on the big picture.
- Maintain open communication and dialogue.
- Try to “keep things light” and look for humor.
- Schedule time to focus on one another and reconnect.
- Make mindful decisions that positively impact your partner and relationship.
- Acknowledge your shared stressors and tension.
- Apologize when needed without letting problems build up or fester.
- Have daily “check-ins” where you discuss your needs.
- Remember the importance of alone time.
- Maintain daily routines to foster predictability and structure.
- Focus on “the little things,” including simple gestures of kindness.

This is a stressful time for all of us, and it's important to realize that everyone needs compassion and patience, including ourselves and those closest to us. If you're struggling with relationship difficulties, couples counseling can be a much-needed resource and can often be accessed with an employee assistance program, or EAP.

If you have an FEI EAP, you can receive marital or couples counseling free of charge. Therapists can support both parties in an unbiased and neutral way and help you formulate steps to move forward. Confidential sessions can be facilitated in person or virtually to accommodate current safety protocols.

Keep in mind that if you or someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse, it's important to seek immediate help. The National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1.800.799.SAFE (7233), is accessible 24/7 and reminds us that “everyone deserves healthy relationships.”



## Finding Work-Life Balance When Working Remotely

By Nancy Vogt, Account Manager

Many of us have been working from home for some time now. At first, I assumed it would be a short-term solution to be safe from COVID. But after all these months it occurred to me (OK, maybe I'm a little slow) that working from home is going to be a long-term situation.

My home life is a little different from most people's in that I don't have children, but I am the sole caregiver for my 100-year-old mother who lives with me. She's in very good health but has trouble with her short-term memory, which leads to many interesting situations. In many ways, it's like living with a 3-year-old with a mind of her own. She's also as big as I am and not any more likely to respond to "it's for your own good" than a 3-year-old would.

I decided I needed to make a clear separation of work and home. When I was working in the office, I'd start work at the same time and end at the same time. At home, I had a tendency to work past my usual quitting time if there was work to do. This was not work that had to be done that day, but it was there, and I was there, so it was very hard to ignore. But this would cut into my downtime which everyone needs, and my dinner preparation time, which was stressful with my mother wanting to eat now—or worse, wanting to help. Have you ever had a 3-year-old "help" you make dinner? Enough said.

The other thing I did was separate my work area and living area. I had been working at the dining room table so I could keep an eye on things, which was very distracting and

unnecessary. So, I set up my desk in a room with a door I could close when doing virtual meetings or concentrating. By the way, I made that sound simple, but it wasn't. It took some rearranging, jury-rigging and a 90-minute call with IT to get it set up. But I can tell you, it was worth the trouble.

I'm still trying to fight the urge to turn on my computer over the weekend. Having it in another room has made its siren call a little harder to hear. Give me strength!

Don't misunderstand, I really do like working from home. It has allowed me to spend time with my mother, which I wouldn't be able to do otherwise. It's also allowed me to keep her out of an institution, which I'm very grateful for.

After taking my own advice these past few weeks, I feel a lot less stressed. There are still days when I must work late. But learning to roll with the punches has allowed me pick up dinner from a local restaurant without feeling guilty. In fact, I might start doing it more often. I'm supporting my local community. I don't have to cook or clean up. And both Mom and I are getting tired of my cooking!

I realize many people are struggling to find balance when work and life overlap. An employee assistance program can help you overcome these challenges. Our website discusses the many benefits of the [FEI EAP](#)—for employees and their organizations.



## Finding Gratitude in 2020

By Amara Lang, Account Management Associate

The COVID-19 crisis has wreaked havoc on our world, our country, our communities and ourselves. So far [countless people have lost their lives](#) and [millions have lost their jobs](#) and cannot [pay their rent, mortgage or other bills](#). There's no sugar coating it: Many of us are suffering.

The United States has been greatly affected by the pandemic, harboring the [most cases and the most deaths](#). To slow the spread and save lives, most of us have been isolating at home. But [according to recent polls](#), this isolation has had a negative impact on our mental health. [Calls to mental health hotlines](#) have been surging. In fact, SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) [reported an 891% increase](#) in calls from this time last year.

The pandemic, along with the related social and economic conditions—and more recently, how it's highlighted our country's racial inequities—has many of us feeling psychologically defeated. Understandably, we may be feeling a myriad of emotions: anxiety, anger, sadness, depression, hopelessness, helplessness, loneliness, and panic to name a few.

But, being in a constant state of stress isn't healthy—mentally or physically. In times like these, it's important to take time to find some good. Recently, one positive emotion I've been trying to focus on is gratitude. Thankfully, there's research to back up the positive effects of [gratitude and well-being](#).

I'd like to take a moment to make a brief disclaimer, which almost kept me from writing this post. I don't mean to [be tone-deaf to people's hardships](#). Many of my friends and family members have lost their jobs and are struggling. Others are essential workers and risk their lives to provide healthcare, food, and sanitation. However, I would like to use this opportunity to remind us that there is goodness in the world, even in unprecedented times. Even a flower can grow through a crack in the cement. Similarly, expressing gratitude during difficult times can help provide us with hope and improve our well-being.

During this pandemic, I'm grateful for...

1. **Social connection.** Even if it has been virtual, [social connection is a vital human need](#). Within as few as eight days in lockdown, I was starting to feel cabin fever setting in. Many of my friends and family were too, including people I haven't talked to in years. We got to work and set up virtual video calls. Saturdays at 8 p.m., I fix my hair, turn on my phone, and grab a beverage. Of course, this doesn't replace in-person connection but it's useful for now. This may even develop into a new tradition going forward! Other ideas for connecting include joining online groups. For example, on Facebook there are groups that share common interests, like recipes, dogs, cats, politics, TV shows, neighborhoods, mental health, humor and so much more. If you're struggling with addiction, abuse or other vices, organizations like [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) have moved to online meetings. Also, counselors are offering video/ telephonic counseling. So, consider giving that old friend a call, joining a support group or contacting your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to find a counselor.
2. **The great outdoors.** I've always enjoyed walking, running, hiking, biking and other outdoor activities. With today's social distancing recommendations, I find myself outdoors more than ever. In fact, studies show that [nature reduces stress](#) and increases well-being. Also, [exercise is good for mental health](#). For a clearer mind, put those sneakers on and get outside! Just be mindful of the [CDC guidelines](#) during this pandemic.
3. **Gaining a new perspective.** During these unprecedented times, previously held beliefs are being questioned and new perspectives are emerging. For example, workers are the ones holding up whatever economy remains and millions of us have only recently recognized their value. It's also led many to question the profit-over-people system and remind us what matters most. While crises are unwelcome experiences, they often lead to welcome changes. The Great Depression led to several changes including jobs programs, policy reforms and Social Security ([one of the most popular programs](#) in the country). It appears the coronavirus crisis is already serving as a catalyst for change, especially regarding racial injustices.

While these are just a few things I'm grateful for, there are countless others. [Greater Good Magazine's Gratitude section](#) offers several other ways to cultivate gratitude and their [monthly calendar](#) offers daily tips on finding resilience in these uncertain times. In addition, [Mayo Clinic has a gratitude page](#), which offers a free virtual program to improve mental well-being via daily journaling.

If you need help finding gratitude, increasing resilience, or locating resources, please contact your EAP. The FEI EAP Services Center is accessible 24/7 to provide advice and referrals.



## Parenting and Working from Home During the Pandemic

By Sara Abduraseel, EAP Counselor

Who in the world would have thought our lives would transition so quickly, becoming almost completely virtual in a matter of months?

Virtual is a word that has been applied to many things lately: Virtual classrooms and virtual meetings. Virtual doctor appointments and virtual shopping sprees.

Yet, what really stuck out to me is that everything virtual is done from home. Kids are attending school with their Chromebooks, while parents are working on their laptop, often sharing the same space.

Although it's challenging to keep little kids engaged with online learning while maintaining your work ethic and productivity, it's also important to accept our current reality and make necessary adjustments by setting realistic goals for ourselves and our families.

That means acknowledging the global pandemic and doing our best to follow safety guidelines. It also means doing our best to reduce stress and anxiety as we juggle work and parenting.

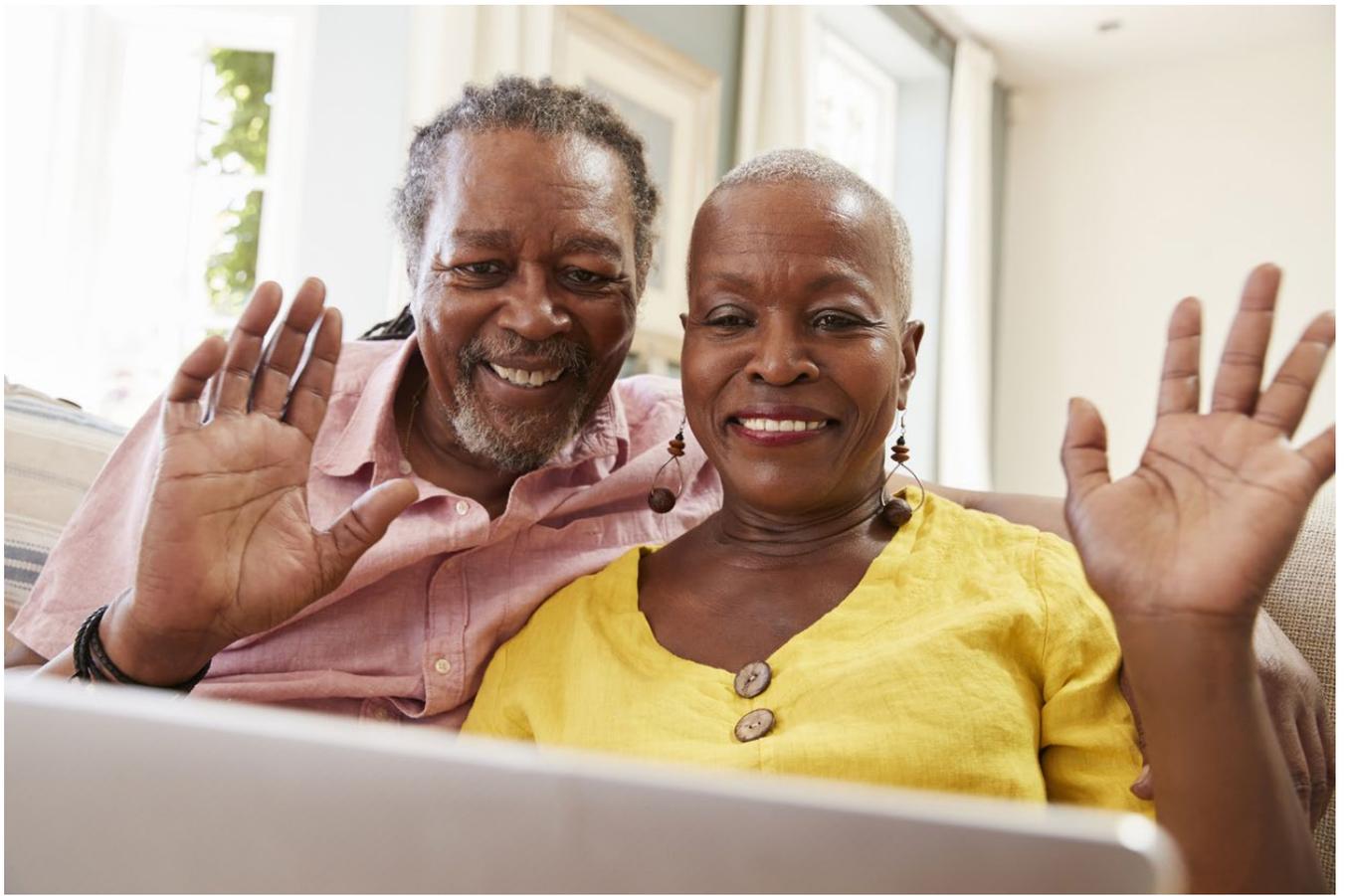
Using a planner and creating a flexible master schedule have proven effective for working

adults and school-aged children. Writing a daily to-do list and following routines are very helpful. It's important to include a variety of activities and regular mealtimes. Parents can prepare these meals before they start working or during their lunch breaks.

Another recommendation is to give children choices. For instance, between their classes, they can choose to take short breaks to work on homework assignments or engage in play time.

At the end the day, it's important for parents and kids to engage in self-care to improve their physical and emotional well-being. This could involve physical activities, creative play, exercise and chores.

Finally, it's important for working parents who oversee their children's schooling to seek support. An employee assistance program is a good way to start. If you have an [FEI EAP](#), please reach out to your EAP Services Center for mental health counseling and referrals.



## Spread a Little Kindness: It Can Be Powerful Medicine

By Randy Kratz, Senior Account Manager

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to be with my grandmother before she passed away. As usual, one of her first questions was, “Are you showing kindness to others?”

“Grammy,” as I called her, grew up on a small dairy farm in eastern Pennsylvania. Her greatest gifts were preparing food for others as a gesture of love and showing genuine kindness and consideration.

She knew that people who practiced acts of kindness create happiness, and those who experienced kindness feel more connected to themselves and others.

Love, kindness and connection are universal and basic human needs. Along with trust, respect, safety and acceptance, they help us thrive and feel fulfilled. Doing something helpful for others—like showing love, kindness and connection—benefits both the giver and receiver.

According to a recent study, small acts of kindness that are intended to benefit victims after a tragedy also appear to strengthen the resilience and well-being of the person performing the act. Another study has discovered that [civic engagement is linked to resilience](#).

So, how can we provide these basic human needs during this period of social distancing? Can we do more with our digital devices to foster and encourage kindness and meaningful connection?

Being kind is an innate ability or trait we all possess. Being kind comes from the heart. It requires us to open ourselves and show our softer, authentic side.

Making a connection means taking risks and being vulnerable in a world where pride, performance and “never letting them see you sweat” are sometimes more highly valued.

Is there room for this type of vulnerability? In short, yes!

Brené Brown, an author and professor who studies human connection, discusses this in her TED Talk, [The Power of Vulnerability](#). Since 2010, more than 22 million people have viewed this video, setting a TED Talk record.

Obviously, this concept of vulnerability resonates with many, many of us.

A doctor in a New Jersey hospital recently wrote the following after having to perform an emergency lifesaving intervention on a colleague with the coronavirus:

“I intubated my colleague today. ... As scared as I was, I knew that I owed it to my colleague to be calm, focused, and collected. ... It’s ok to show emotion. In doing so, we show that we care, we grieve, we love. In the end, our love and service to one another may very well be the things that get us through this.”

These powerful words speak for themselves.

When you share a personal experience or story, you make yourself vulnerable to the listener. Stories can both reveal our flaws, mistakes and challenges. And they can illustrate what makes us fully human and our best selves.

Our stories show that despite the distance between us, we are all human. Much like this public health crisis, our stories provide us the opportunity to see that despite our socio-economic status, the color of our skin, where we live, what generation we represent, we are all in this together.

Many of us are drawn to the transformative power of vulnerability that sharing personal stories creates. This can help us connect with each other in ways not otherwise possible. It can help us experience a sense of happiness despite our social distancing.

A friend recently shared that working remotely is giving her new and surprising perspectives, like she sincerely misses the company of her challenging and difficult co-workers and is looking forward to seeing them again. As I listened, the tone in her voice was kind, thoughtful and inspiring.

This human connection improves the social bonds that encourage us to cooperate, rather than compete. My grandmother understood that such cooperation was critical for farmers living off

the land because those who were kind and worked cooperatively with each other survived better than those who struggled in conflict and resentment.

As an EAP account manager and consultant, I regularly talk with employees about improving inter-personal relationships. They often ask for ideas on how to better connect with others.

It's very hard, if not impossible, to change certain behaviors. In the end, the only thing we can change is ourselves and how we respond.

So, then, if we want something to change, we must be the first to act. We need to give to receive. So, make that phone call. Send that text. Invite someone new to join that virtual meeting.

As a counselor and clinical social worker during this time of high stress, uncertainty and overwhelm, I believe that most of us will not require a therapist, but all of us will need therapy.

So, shower each other with kindness. It's good medicine.



## Guided Discussions: Helping Employees Process the Challenges of 2020

By Terri Howard, Director, Business Development

Today's workforces are coping with many layers of overlapping stress stemming from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and our country's social unrest. These events have also generated a greater awareness of our country's systemic inequities, especially as they relate to health care, police brutality and generational trauma.

It's natural for events like these to generate anxiety and upheaval in people's lives. However, when this turmoil seeps into our professional lives, it can impact how we interact with each other and how we manage our work.

To remain resilient during these challenging times, some organizations have asked me to facilitate "guided discussions." These are virtual meetings where small groups of employees gather online using such platforms as Skype or Zoom.

### Each discussion is different

These meetings have become an opportunity for people to speak their truths in a safe and nonjudgmental environment. As the facilitator, my goal is to help participants process their

thoughts and feelings so they can get to know and understand each other better—and work together successfully.

I begin our meetings by outlining some ground rules so that everyone feels welcome to share their personal thoughts and experiences. I assure them that this will be a safe space—and while we may not always agree with each other, we will respect each other.

I then ask a series of open-ended questions to prompt the discussion and keep people engaged. The topics have included racism, implicit bias, use of force, social injustices and more. People often discover that they do not fully understand our country's history. They also see how today's events impact various groups of people differently.

My goal is to help people understand how today's events are affecting their mental health, relationships, work performance and coping strategies. We also look at ways we can support each other so that the entire workforce can remain strong and cohesive in the months ahead.

### **Part of a larger initiative**

I recommend that these hour-long discussions be viewed as part of a larger strategic initiative to incorporate EDI, or equity, diversity and inclusion, into the fabric of an organization. Several organizations are doing just that.

For example, after a recent discussion, one group realized that their employees needed to know more about each other from a cultural perspective. I will be assessing the managers' cultural competency and recommending various resources to help them become more culturally competent.

Another customer used our guided discussion as springboard to develop a year-long training program and outlined topics for the months ahead. A third organization has decided to have quarterly discussions on issues related to social justice.

But it's not just organizations and their employees who benefit from these conversations. They've also helped me process my layers of stress and made me more aware of what others are experiencing.

To learn more about our training programs, please visit the [Organizational Development](#) page of our website.



## Greater Cultural Competency Is Needed Among our Workforces

By Terri Howard, Director, Business Development

The COVID-19 pandemic and Black Lives Matter movement have brought renewed attention to our country's systemic inequalities. Sometimes the related tensions and divisions seep into our workplaces, where they can interfere with employee relationships and productivity.

As an EDI and organizational development specialist, I help businesses and organizations handle these challenges by providing consultations and trainings. Lately, I've been addressing many issues concerning the need for organizations to become more diverse, equitable and inclusive. This is a goal I've been addressing from many angles.

Beginning this past June, several organizations asked me to help their employees process the death of George Floyd and the resulting social unrest. So I started facilitating [guided discussions](#), which allow employees to discuss their thoughts and feelings in a safe environment and gain a better understanding of their colleagues' perspectives.

Another way I've been helping is by facilitating [Intercultural Development Inventory](#) assessments, which help businesses and organizations obtain a baseline understanding of how culturally competent their employees are.

Understanding the cultural competency continuum

Cultural competency refers to our ability to understand and appreciate cultural differences

among other groups of people. The IDI assessment measures where people are on the cultural competency continuum.

People who are the least culturally competent fall on the left side of the continuum. They have a more polarized perspective and associate mostly with people who look like and think like they do. They're described as having an "us" versus "them" mindset.

On the right side of the continuum are those who are the most culturally competent. They not only are more aware of other people's cultural differences; they also are more aware of themselves. This allows them to engage with culturally diverse groups of people and embrace their differences.

Some people claim they are "colorblind," that they don't see other people's differences and, therefore, treat everyone equally. While that may sound admirable, the reality is that people do have racial and cultural differences and those differences need to be acknowledged. They make us who we are.

### **Moving forward from where you are**

The IDI assessment uses a 50-question survey to establish a baseline understanding of how culturally competent an individual is. Using that information, the IDI then creates a developmental plan with specific activities and self-reflections to help that individual become more culturally competent. The IDI can also create developmental plans for specific groups of people, such as managers or entire departments.

Some organizations are using this tool at the start of their journey, to introduce people to the concept of cultural competency. Others are using it to help make their current efforts more robust, while still others are using it to measure and validate their progress.

While today's workforces are quickly becoming more diverse, studies report that by 2025, people of color will make up the majority of our country's workforce. If that's the case, it would behoove everyone to get to know each other—so we can communicate and work together cohesively and productively.

Although I'm receiving excellent feedback on the IDI assessment, I emphasize that it's not simply a task to check off the list. Developing cultural competency is one of many goals that organizations should pursue to create a more equitable, diverse and inclusive workplace. Other trainings that can help include implicit bias, microaggressions and white fragility.

To learn more about organizational development and how it can enhance your workplace culture, [click here](#).



## Addressing Microaggressions in the Workplace

By Terri Howard, Director, Business Development

The Black Lives Matter movement has brought renewed attention to our country's racist history and systemic injustices. It's also brought attention to how these practices continue today in our policing, healthcare, education, housing and so on.

To help employees become more culturally aware, many workplaces are engaging in thoughtful conversations about race and justice. They're also implementing equity, diversity and inclusion training and initiatives.

However, if workplaces are to make true progress in combating racism, they must address all forms of racism—large and small, including microaggressions. Racism in any form reinforces white privilege and undermines a culture of inclusion.

As the name suggests, microaggressions are small slights, indignities, put-downs and insults that people in marginalized groups experience due to their race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability or religion. Whether they're verbal, nonverbal, behavioral or part of the environment, microaggressions are meant to be derogatory and create a hostile and unwelcoming work environment.

Microaggressions have been referred to as "death by a thousand cuts." Left unaddressed, these everyday slights can impact a victim's job satisfaction, work performance, self-esteem, and mental and physical health. They have even led to suicide.

## Examples of racial microaggressions

Within the workplace, racial microaggressions might include a white employee assuming that a Black employee is of a lesser employment status and asking that co-worker to get coffee or make copies. Another example could be a white person saying, "I succeeded because I worked hard—I didn't rely on handouts." However, this type of thinking fails to recognize that society and workplaces have built-in advantages for white people, making it easier for them to get hired and promoted because of their race and not their competence.

Microaggressions also occur when someone tells a racist joke but insists that it's harmless fun or argues that "you're being too sensitive." They also include overlooking the contributions of a Black employee or even their presence.

Simply stating that "I don't see color," or "we're all one race—the human race" is also a type of microaggression, because it fails to recognize a vital part of a person's identity.

People from privileged backgrounds may say marginalized individuals are overreacting to these slights or that we should focus on bigger issues. But truth is, microaggressions create a hostile work environment and should not be tolerated.

## Addressing these slights

The first step in addressing microaggressions is to recognize them when they occur. It's also important to become aware of your own biases and start confronting those beliefs.

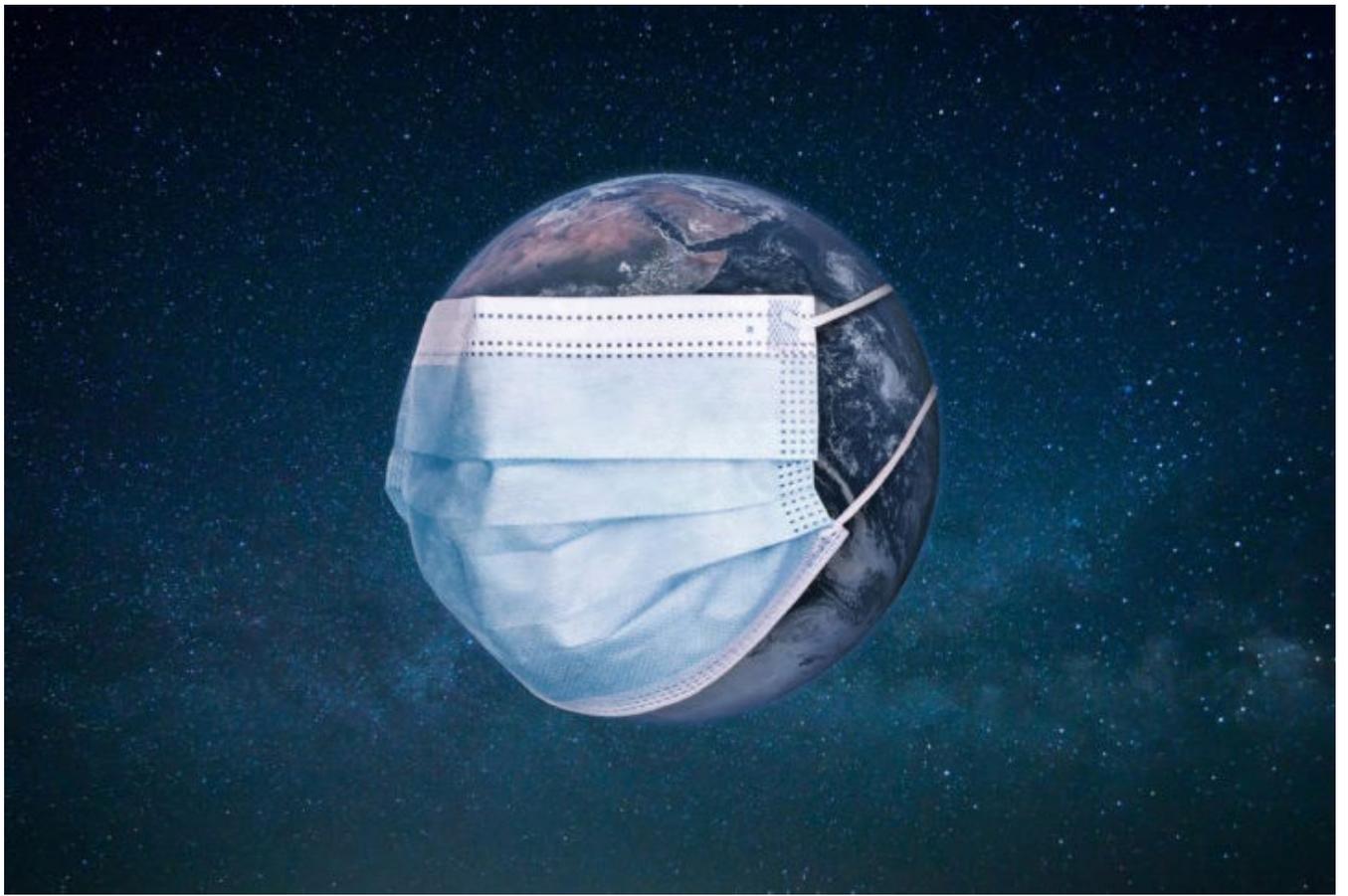
When you notice microaggressions, it's helpful to call them out. If you are white, you have the advantage of speaking out with fewer repercussions than if you were Black. As you move forward in confronting microaggressions, it's important to consider what you hope to accomplish. Are you hoping to make someone more aware? Are you looking for an apology? Are you hoping to stop these behaviors from reoccurring?

It's also helpful to consider the responses you're likely to face. Will you trigger an argument or jeopardize your safety? Will it affect your relationship? Will you regret not saying something?

Some experts recommend you prepare yourself by keeping a few responses in mind, such as: What do you mean by that? Or, you may not realize this, but I found your remark hurtful. Another tactic is to carefully educate others about microaggressions. If it's not safe or you're uncomfortable confronting these racist behaviors on your own, it may be helpful to report them to your manager or human resources department.

Employers today must enforce strict anti-racism policies. Allowing any form of racism to continue creates a hostile work environment, and the workplace can be liable. The world is changing, and we must learn how to become comfortable in a multicultural, ethnically diverse environment.

To help your organization become more culturally aware, please consider FEI's [Organizational Development](#) services.



## What Happens When the Crisis Becomes a Marathon

By Vivian Marinelli, Senior Director, Crisis Management Services

As one of many emergency response teams providing support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have just passed the six-month marker since we first activated to support our company and our stakeholders. The majority of emergency response teams train to be able to respond at a moment's notice, quickly assess the situation, and assign responsibilities and resources to put order to the chaos.

Other than on-the-ground recovery efforts from a natural disaster or the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, an emergency response typically has a very short timeframe, ranging from a few hours to several days. In runner's terms, this is basically a sprint. However, when the crisis becomes a marathon, much like we are experiencing with the COVID-19 pandemic, how do you support the emergency response teams providing the support?

### The first 30 days—a 5K

On January 20, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed that human-to-human transmission of the coronavirus had occurred. On January 21, 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed the first case of the coronavirus in the U.S. On February 3, 2020, the U.S. declared a public health emergency. On February 25, 2020, the CDC indicated

that COVID-19 was moving toward pandemic status. For most organizations, their emergency response teams were activated to assess the immediate precautions necessary to maintain the health and safety of their staff and stakeholders and maintain their operations. These included:

- Communications
- Review of business continuity and disaster recovery (BC/DR) plans
- Educating staff on CDC guidelines regarding handwashing, use of hand sanitizers and known symptoms for COVID-19
- Limiting air travel within the US

Due to the human-to-human transmission of the virus, organizations and their emergency response teams began planning to take their operations off-site and have staff working remotely. Many companies had already included remote work into their business continuity and disaster recovery plans due to weather, natural disasters or other business disruptions.

At this point, most emergency response teams were focused on maintaining operations. Their work responsibilities shifted to include increases in operational meetings, workload and work hours. The 5K was turning into a half-marathon, and the strategy to stay the course needed to be adjusted to support the team supporting the organization.

### **The next 60 days—a half-marathon**

As the number of states reporting positive cases of COVID-19 continued to increase, it became apparent that the human-to-human transmission of the virus was increasing. In late February 2020, organizations and their emergency response teams' worst-case scenario became reality. On March 19, 2020, California became the first state to issue a stay-at-home order. By April 7, 2020, 44 states had also issued similar orders.

Many organizations had already implemented some level of remote work for staff during normal business operations. To maintain the solidarity of the organization and the health and safety of the staff, the response to the pandemic needed to shift once again.

Emergency response teams were now tasked with moving all business operations remote. Depending on the organization this may or may not have been possible. For those who could have staff working remotely, their IT teams now took the lead in the race. Their immediate concerns included:

- Secure connections for staff devices (VPN)
- Ensuring remote connectivity to servers
- Confirmation of all platform accessibility
- Communication platforms (i.e., Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc.)
- Testing load capacity

In addition to the technology issues, the emergency response team also had to review all critical operations for the organization to confirm whether they could be supported remotely or determine the backup plan. These included:

- Communications (internal and external)
- Finance (invoicing, payments and receipts)
- Payroll
- Mail

Many organizations used a staged approach to take their operations remote. This allowed the IT team to address issues as they arose and provide the necessary support. This also provided critical feedback to continue with the process.

### **90+ days—the marathon**

It has now been almost six months since the initial stay-at-home orders were put into action. Due to the continuing increase in positive cases of COVID-19 and concerns for health and safety, many organizations continue to operate remotely. Others have resumed operations but have put in place additional precautions recommended by the CDC. These include:

- Deep cleaning of work areas (especially if a positive case had been reported)
- Air duct cleaning
- Spacing of work areas (minimum of 6 feet between staff)
- Face mask requirements (in shared areas or if 6-foot spacing is not available)
- Limited access for visitors and patrons
- Hand sanitizer made available throughout the workspace
- Hand-washing reminders
- Personal responsibility for maintaining safety and health (coughing into elbow, staying home if symptomatic, etc.)

Some companies also took the additional step to add contact tracking/tracing into their workplace to quickly identify and alert staff who might have had close contact with an individual who had now tested positive for COVID-19.

Even with these health and safety precautions, organizations continue to have a portion of their staff working remotely because they identify as high-risk or feel anxious about possible exposure to the virus in the workplace. As a result, emergency response teams continue to be engaged to provide support to their organizations to maintain operations.

The pandemic has provided organizations with an opportunity to actualize their business continuity and disaster recovery plans. How did your plan weather COVID-19?

To learn more about our crisis management services, please contact [FEI](#).



## A Message of Hope To Essential Caregivers

By Daniel J. Potterton, Chief Operating Officer

September was [Suicide Prevention Awareness Month](#). This past Saturday, we observed [World Mental Health Day](#). Both events seek to raise awareness of mental health and mobilize efforts of support.

With everyday stresses now intensified by COVID-19, it's important to promote suicide prevention awareness, especially among essential caregivers. This includes emergency room physicians, nurses, mental health professionals, emergency services workers, first responders, home-health aids and people providing primary care for a family member.

### Statistics of despair

COVID-19 has taken its toll. Even prior to the pandemic, the nation's suicide rate had reached its highest level since World War II. According to a [study by the CDC](#), 41 percent of all adults struggled with mental health issues or substance abuse this past June.

The emotional and psychological impact of the pandemic and its resulting fallout has contributed to feelings of hopelessness and despair. This mental strain is especially difficult for frontline caregivers, who are working in crowded, high-risk, pressure-cooker environments.

The persistent anxiety can cause them to feel burned out, frustrated and overwhelmed. Along with the fear and anxiety of being infected themselves, they may also second guess themselves when patients die.

There's good news: Teletherapy is becoming more accessible for those seeking mental health treatment. Psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers and counselors now provide remote therapy and support. This shift toward teletherapy started even prior to the pandemic.

For many essential caregivers, this help is available through company-sponsored employee assistance programs, or EAPs. It's also free and confidential.

## The importance of hope

In a world where things seem desperate in the face of uncertainty, there is nothing wrong with hope.

The concept of hope has been recognized throughout history. For example, Roman statesman Cicero made this observation in 63 BC: "While there's life, there is hope."

In 1945, author and holocaust survivor Victor Frankl discussed the importance of hope in *Man's Search for Meaning*. He noticed that those prisoners who focused on the possibility of seeing a separated loved one had better chances of survival:

"Other things being equal, those apt to survive the camps were those oriented toward the future—toward a task, or a person, waiting for them in the future, toward a meaning to be fulfilled by them in the future."

According to Frankl, finding meaning in life is what gives us hope. He identified three main ways to find this meaning:

- By making a difference in the world through our actions, our work, our creations.
- By experiencing truth or beauty or encountering someone, especially someone we love.
- By adopting a courageous and exemplary attitude in situations of unavoidable suffering.

He also wrote about the importance of choice: "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

That freedom of choice can never be taken away. There are always choices. What do you choose?

ATTENTION ESSENTIAL CAREGIVERS: Where would we be without you? Be mindful that through your service to humanity, your actions, your skills, your listening, your consoling, your guiding, your encouragement, your advocating, your connecting, informing, teaching, supporting, it is you who provide hope. When you're in need of hope, please know that help is available.

FEI's [crisis management](#) and [employee assistance programs](#) are designed to meet the needs and recovery efforts of individuals, community groups and families following any kind of crisis event. We have helped in pandemics, natural disasters, terrorist acts and mass casualty accidents affecting anywhere from one individual to scores of people.

[Consult with an FEI account representative today](#) to learn more about developing resilience, planning, preparation, response and recovery for traumatic incidents.



## Preventing Workplace Violence During Stressful Times

By Michael Bugenhagen, Sales Executive, Business Development

As the pandemic continues into its ninth month, employees across the nation are feeling the effects of ongoing stress, anxiety and loss. According to recent studies, this turmoil has triggered skyrocketing levels of depression, substance abuse and violence.

Now, as we enter the final stretch of election season, political divisiveness and uncertainty are eroding our emotional well-being even further. Communities and workplaces are feeling the strain.

According to the [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#), federal law entitles all employees to a safe work environment. With the addition of the 1970 [General Duty Clause](#), OSHA has a means “to address hazards for which there is no standard on the books.” In other words, employers can be held liable for workplace violence.

### Why have a workforce violence prevention plan?

Although cases involving workplace violence represent a small minority of OSHA violations, employers should do all they can to ensure their work environments remain safe and free from workplace violence. It's the right thing to do for a variety of reasons:

- **All employees deserve a secure environment.** Employees want to perform their work duties safely and return home safely after work.
- **It's a valuable investment.** Employers invest heavily in employee recruitment and retention. Losing quality employees because they do not feel safe can harm an organization's bottom line and reputation.
- **Increased safety leads to a more productive environment.** A well-executed violence prevention program leads to a healthier and safer work environment, allowing employees to be more focused and productive.

## What to consider when creating a plan

To create a successful workplace violence prevention plan, it's important to consider several key factors. First, of course, is to have a plan. Although many plans include a zero-tolerance policy, it's helpful to realize there is no one-size-fits-all solution, as explained in this earlier post, [When Zero Tolerance Needs More Teeth](#).

It's also important to train employees upon hire and throughout their employment. Training should cover the plan's policies and procedures. It should also cover the reporting process, asking for help, developing situational awareness and de-escalating potentially violent situations.

A commitment from all levels of management is key to success. Leadership should create policies and make them visible, establish organizational structure and provide funding (and time) for needed resources. Leadership should also ensure employees a secure process for reporting concerns and that all incidents will be taken seriously.

Is now the time to revisit your workplace violence prevention plans and resources?

At FEI, we help organizations and their employees overcome challenges in four different ways—through our [employee assistance program](#), [organizational development](#), [workplace violence prevention](#) and [crisis management](#). To learn more, please [contact us](#).



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FEI has a 40-year history in enhancing workforce resiliency by offering a full spectrum of solutions, from EAP and organizational development to workplace violence prevention and crisis management. One of the most successful social enterprises in America, FEI was created by the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities, a national network of social sector organizations working to achieve its vision of healthy and equitable society.

