The COVID-19 Test

As an entrepreneur, two streams of thought may be running through your mind. First, what do I do if this virus hits me, or hits my loved ones? Second, how do I survive in business during this uncertainty? I have addressed the second question in my previous post titled “What Do I Do Now?” Let me now address the first question - What do I do if this virus hits me, or hits my loved ones? This question and its line of thought lead to two powerful emotions in us – “fear” and “anxiety”. This is normal. Thoughts, filled with fear and anxiety, have run through my mind several times, and they probably have been weighing on many of us, whether we openly talk about it or not. The fear and anxiety are being further fuelled by the millions of WhatsApp messages, Facebook posts and TV blasts that have been bombarding us. Logically, we must first reframe the question to “What should I do to ensure that I or my loved ones do not get infected by this virus?” The answer to this one has already been provided by the experts and has been widely publicized – most of us are now already practicing them – washing our hands, not touching our face, avoiding crowds, social distancing, wearing masks (if required). Is there anything else that we can do? Inputs from all those (like China, Europe) who have already handled this, certainly confirm that these best practices are the only way to prevent the spread of infection. So, let us do the best that we can do under the current circumstances, and follow these best practices. Yet, the fear and anxiety persist. Every new WhatsApp message is prompting me to run and wash my hands a few times. It is important that we address these two emotions and understand the way to handle them, or else they can completely cripple our functioning. We would have all watched World War 2 movies where the Jewish people in Germany stay hidden in basements and cellars, dreading the knock of the Gestapo. We can now truly empathise/appreciate the fear and anxiety that they would have undergone. Here we are, battling those same emotions, dreading the Gestapo who can come silently. Let us watch out for three dimensions in which these emotions occur – Frequency, Intensity, and Duration. Frequency refers to how often these emotions disturb me – is it on the receipt of every message, every TV blast, every few minutes? Intensity refers to how strong these feelings are when they surface – yeah, it slightly upsets me, or I really get worried, or it leads to strong panic? Duration refers to the period for which the anxiety lasts – it weighs on my mind for the entire day, bothers me for 15-20 minutes, or can I shake it off immediately? Work towards reducing the Frequency, Intensity and Duration of these emotions – a few tips on how, follow. Let us understand that in any situation, however tough, there are two aspects – things that are not in our control, and things that are in our control. However much we think about it or worry about it, there is nothing we can do about
things that are not in our control – how fast the virus is spreading, how many countries and people are being affected, non-availability of a vaccine, forced lockdowns, slowdown in economic activity and such. And, there are things in our control – like implementing the best practices – for ourselves, for our loved ones, and for people connected with us – for our employees, maids, watchmen, delivery boys, and others. Let us focus on things in our control and forget about the things that are not in our control. Which brings me to address the most important player in combating this situation – our mind. Social distancing is easy – it is mere physical distancing – staying at home, avoiding crowds. We also need to practice Distancing of the Mind – to eliminate the disturbing thoughts about this virus and directing the mind to more productive activities – and there are many. Watch your thoughts. You will know that an anxious thought has now entered your mind. If you consciously watch it and acknowledge that you are now getting anxious, or getting scared, and decide that you are going to move your thoughts to other activities, you will find that you are able to do so. Therefore, the Frequency, Intensity, and Duration of the disturbing thoughts will reduce. Plus, if you are able to distance yourself from Social Media (like I have done), you certainly eliminate the triggers that create disturbance. I am no Swamiji. I am no expert in mind control. I am an ordinary person, with the same thoughts and feelings, like many of you. I have shared the thoughts that have run through my mind, and the ways in which I have responded. I was worried about COVID-19 and its impact two weeks ago – impact on my business, my family, my close friends. I am not worried now. I know that I am doing all the things that I can do, to the best of my ability, doing all those things that are in my control, following all the best practices recommended by the experts. I am sure that each one of us can get rid of the disturbing thoughts around this virus, and keep our mind strong to get through this situation, by focusing on what we can do next. COVID-19 is a test – a test of ourselves as people – a test of our inner strength as an individual, as a responsible citizen – to do the best in this situation – for ourselves as well as for the rest of society. Let us combat it to the best of our ability and emerge stronger at the end of it.

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