

Lessons Learned: From The Challenger to the Challenging Covid

During my travels last week, I downloaded and watched the Netflix Series Challenger: The Final Flight. Such a great four-part series that took me back to my youth in the mid 80s. A time when the idea of space travel was being pushed like free penny candy being tossed from a parade float. A time when our teachers asked us to dream about not only traveling through space but maybe one day living or vacationing in space. NASA toys and t-shirts everywhere, Ralphie from the Christmas Story was tapped to lead NASA's Young Astronauts Program (seriously), a movie called SpaceCamp was set for a 1986 release, and President Reagan was driving the hype machine. And for the first time, an ordinary citizen - a teacher no less (so exciting) was set to go to space. And in a moment, on January 28, 1986, that all changed.

I can still remember that moment, watching it on a TV that was wheeled into the classroom. It was shocking. It was upsetting. It was terrifying. And it forever changed the landscape of space exploration, in particular, the public's excitement and attitude towards the program. It was a generational and life altering event, much like the events that shaped generations noted in my [second blog](#). It made me think about how Covid has served as that life altering moment, and for the purposes of this blog, how it has forever changed the landscape of the work environment and the way in which current and future graduates will seek and secure employment.

ENX2 is currently positioned for growth, meaning myself and our Talent Coordinator Mariah Curtis will be spending a lot more time together. On a side note, a special extra shoutout to Mariah who is not only managing new hires, but interviewing and selecting our intern teams for the Summer and Fall semesters. And in an interesting twist, Mariah was an intern and Connect Student Intern at my previous location - meaning she was on the other side of the table from me during the interview process.

And Mariah interviewed just like she was taught - and how our education institutions continued to teach: Walk in the room confident, smiling, making direct eye contact as you shake their hand. Confident but not over confident. Take a seat only when offered. Maintain that eye contact during the interview. Leave behind your resume and finalize with one more firm handshake before leaving the room. And now, Covid.

During the past month, Mariah and I have reached out to several candidates for interviews - giving them an option to interview in-person or via Zoom. In-person interviews? Yikes. Everything they had been taught and detailed above was out the window. Now, you must wait outside the office to receive a temperature check. You must sign a liability waiver. Next, move onto the hand sanitizing station before entering the conference room where you somehow have to maintain eye contact with people scattered around a room to adhere to social distancing protocols. Your resume? Keep it in your bag. Answers muffled? Of course, we are all wearing masks. And when finished, no handshakes just a point to where they can access the door.

But that's only part of the equation. Our first hire, Chris Knighton, started this week - our first hire on the backend of Covid. He was greeted by only a handful of us, unable to tell if we were smiling because we had masks on. The rest of the team? - he had to meet them over Zoom. The hyped ENX2 headshot and being cheered on by the team was replaced with only Logan and I cheering on and congratulating Chris. The bustle of the office was replaced with the soft sounds of Spotify on the TV. Such a weird time and one that we are all trying to navigate. I recently posted an article on LinkedIn noting how a majority of employees now *expect* to work remotely in some manner. And where companies such as Facebook will allow up to 50% of their employees to work remotely forever. And that's my Lesson Learned today - Covid has forever changed the work environment.

If ENX2 intends to meet our projected growth path, we must understand the impacts of Covid, from the interview process, to the on-boarding of new team members, to engaging our team as a whole. We know that we'll be back in the office again, but what will that look like? Most likely with some element of remote working - and that's not going to fade. During the past year and a half, consumer habits have changed, whether it's the way you order takeout, or shop for groceries, or watch a movie. Covid has been great for some companies - DoorDash, Instacart, Streaming Services, and even resurrected the popularity of drive-in movie theaters - and that's not going away. While other companies have derailed. So the immediate awkwardness of welcoming Chris and his interaction with the team is something we need to adjust to - and as COO, I must embrace that, reposition thought processes, and leverage new techniques to engage and grow our team.

As the Challenger tragedy impacted the impression of space travel for every kid sitting in a classroom watching that launch, Covid will change the way recent and future graduates as they venture into the workplace. From how they interview, to the location of the company they work for, to how they interact with their team, will be different. The companies and leadership teams that can recognize that and adjust will thrive. Welcome to the new norm.

What do you think? How are you adjusting to the "new norm" post Covid? What are you or your companies doing to pivot? Feel free to send me your comments at joseph@enx2marketing.com.

Side Note

Last week's "Side Note" entry was all over the place...still makes me laugh when I see that collection of songs. Let's get back on track this week. One of my all-time favorite albums is "Before These Crowded Streets" by the Dave Matthews Band, for multiple reasons. For one, I saw them perform most of these songs at a concert in Roanoke, Virginia just days before the release of the album in 1998. Second, the album is such a roller coaster of feelings and emotions, and one that I gravitate towards quite often. I love the backend of that album the most, with "The Dreaming Tree" and "Pig" and "Spoon," which features Alanis Morissette (more on her in future Side Note sections). One of those albums that you have to listen to from start to finish to get the full effect. It evokes such a great feeling for me, and will always take me back to that rain-filled day in Roanoke, surrounded by friends, and enjoying live music at its finest.