



Return to the “Old Normal”: Prophetic Pain Points to Finish the Year

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Is This the Normal We Want?

The “new normal” is the new buzzword. People say it with both hope and resignation. Even as vaccination rates increase in the U.S., schools reopen and offices resume, it is clear that Before Times are just that:

- According to an Axios/Ipsos poll from May 24, most surveyed did not trust those outside of close family or friends to be honest about their vaccination status.
- 45% of respondents are still wearing a mask outside the house, even as 52% of adult Americans are fully vaccinated, according to the White House.
- A recent Gallup poll found that over half of working Americans want to stay remote – and CEOs who have publicly bashed working from home have been forced to apologize.
- One year after the murder of George Floyd, most Americans cannot agree on social justice, policing, discrimination and racism issues – with strong party differences, according to Axios.
- 81% of Asian Americans surveyed by Pew say violence against them is rising. Most Americans feel there is at least some discrimination against Black, Hispanic/Latino/a and Asian populations.

Key Pain Points: A Look Ahead

2021 has proven to be as challenging in many ways as 2020, even with advances in vaccinations, signs of economic recovery and other traditional signs of hope.

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HEALTHCARE AND PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS

2

RACISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

3

SOCIAL POLARIZATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

4

GLOBAL THREATS

5

RETURN TO WORK



The Second Pandemic Is Here

- Life expectancy for Black males has declined by three years since last year according to the CDC and 2.4 years for Black women.
- According to the Prevent Cancer Foundation, 43 percent of Americans missed preventive care screenings.
- The U.S. National Cancer Institute estimates that missed or delayed breast and colon cancers alone are expected to cause 10,000 extra deaths in the coming decade.



Just as the pandemic has disproportionately affected communities of color, this hidden crisis will target the same minority populations, which have higher rates of diseases like hypertension and diabetes, and less access to quality health care.



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The Struggle Is Far From Over

The social justice movement has led to much greater awareness around the world about racism – and some significant changes. S&P 500 companies appointed 165 directors who are Black, out of a total of 513 new corporate board members, from July 1, 2020 to May 19, 2021, according to an analysis by ISS Solutions. The director of the CDC declared racism “a serious public health threat.” More than 30 states have passed new laws on police reform and oversight.

However, the dichotomy still exists. Even as progress is made, America’s racial divide is growing. Social change is no longer a stand-alone issue. It is part of a company’s overall strategic success. It is how the world works.



Global Is Local and Vice Versa

In addition to domestic issues and stakeholders, companies are also facing more global threats than before.

Issues ranging from climate change to cyberattacks have disrupted supply chains, damaged reputations, and created unseen geopolitical risks. The resurgence of COVID-19 variants in hubs such as India has also reminded us that threats still remain even as other parts of the world seem to have moved on from the pandemic.





Return to Work

Against this backdrop of social unrest, persistent global threats, and continued concerns about pandemic management and preparedness, offices are reopening – and exposing differences between the C-suite and employees.

Most companies have not, for instance, been open during or after BLM protests. How are offices going to manage and address issues in a work environment?

Will everyone be vaccinated? Or masked? Or be mad about those who are not?

Balancing work, home, and family life will also be more difficult as many will not return to an office full time – or do not want to.

Navigating the New Normal

Managing crises in some ways has not changed – even as the landscape, breadth and depth have. But understanding changes in the landscape is critical to help protect reputations and try to get ahead of possible crises:

- **Knowing your stakeholders is more important than ever:** Understanding not just your direct target audiences but who else has influence – and who influences the influencers – can help you anticipate and track potential issues, but also understand how to manage and mitigate a crisis if it does happen.
- **DEI must be cross-integrated as an actionable and measurable business goal:** Diversity is no longer a stand-alone initiative. The BCW Polycultural Consulting Unit goes beyond general market, multicultural or cross-cultural planning to consider multidimensional and sometimes fluid markers of identity, highly differentiated life experiences and specific views on racial and societal issues – with internal and external stakeholders who want to see results and progress, not just casting.
- **Process does not replace listening:** Having a consistent, inclusive process for crisis management is essential – but should never steamroll feedback, especially from employees. Ensure that there is an opportunity for dialogue as appropriate in a crisis plan.
- **Fluidity works up to a point:** Navigating a new normal means being flexible and responsive, but not unprepared. Crisis mitigation, including processes and contingency planning, remains your best defense.
- **Pain points are not to be feared:** Issues no longer live in a vacuum. They are part of your narrative and strategy. Even crises can add to your story with your key audiences and strengthen your brand if you can demonstrate redemption and improvement.