

April 10, 2020

Jim's Excellent Adventure in Virtual Land

Quarantine is not so bad for an introvert. We are JOMOs: Joy of Missing Out. (vs. extraverts, they are FOMOs: Fear of Missing Out) As soon as lockdown hit, I decided I would read and write extensively. In the past month, I'm halfway through my book. And, well, this is my second written piece. (The first was an English paper that I wrote with my high school daughter. I'm really hoping for an A.) Yes, a slow start, but I am undeterred. After breakfast, time with the dogs, and a nap, I will be ready for lunch. And then maybe another chapter.

I have found a new hobby: growing facial hair. The household opinion is split on my beard. My wife and daughters roll their eyes. Our three dogs are indifferent, which I take as approval. I am also playing more guitar. Also frowned upon by the humans but approved of by the canines. One of them howls along with me as I play my three chords and sing songs from the 60s and 70s.

None of us knows how long or how bad this Pandemic may get. I am reassured, though, by the White House estimates which have gone from 1 death to 240,000 and back to 60,000. It reminds me of my days as an analyst, following the insurance industry. Despite my best efforts, using a pencil, spreadsheet, and HP 22 calculator, I never got close to the reported EPS numbers. After a while, I found that trend line estimates were far better than anything I could come up with. (One kindly sell side analyst pulled me aside and informed me that insurance companies play with their reserves so that earnings follow a smooth upward path. Helpful to know. From that point on, I stuck with trend line estimates.)

Yesterday was an especially good day. I scored some toilet paper at the grocery store. My family celebrated me like a returning war hero. Funny, it was a generic brand that my wife would have scolded me for in normal times. But in this brave new world, the whole family treated them like they were relics from the Ming Dynasty.

Focus Consulting is still open for business. Our mighty band of nine has always been virtual, so there's no change for us. Wait, except for the 90% of our business that involves client visits. When the lockdown first occurred, Keith Robinson (our MP) was at a client's office in NYC. He finished his meetings, left the office, and heard the lock click behind him. He was the last visitor at that firm.

Now clients are getting comfortable with Zoom meetings. 68% of remote workers say they like it and prefer it to an office. (Note: 43.5% of all statistics are made up...) Remote work can be amusing. It's fun to see kids and dogs running behind clients during meetings. One client in Bermuda took the call from his balcony, shirtless. Keith asked me afterwards, "What is the protocol for that? Was I supposed to take off my shirt?" Don't know. New world.

Presumably, leadership, teamwork, and culture are more important now than ever. We suggest that leaders check in frequently with their team members. Listen carefully for signs of saturation, like when they say, "Stop it. You are annoying me." At that point, wait an extra day before you call again.

As I said above, FCG is still open for business. So, don't be a stranger. Give us a call. But, please, keep your shirt on.

Time for my nap,

Jim