

Crises often stir the ?mother of invention?

MARK PAVILONS

Human beings are not only resilient, they are a crafty bunch. It's been proven throughout our history that we can be quite innovative and progressive during times of crisis and tragedy. As Danish economist Ester Boserup coined, "necessity is the mother of invention." As a society, currently secluded from our friends and family, we can get caught up in the doom and gloom and grim statistics. Or we can find those silver linings in the current storm clouds. They exist and that list continues to grow. Technology will likely grow in leaps and bounds following this current COVID-19 pandemic. We've already seen a giant rise in use of social media channels, including Zoom. This company offers simplified video conferencing and messaging across any device. Zoom, and those that follow suit, will make leaps and bounds and have a tremendous impact on society in the future. Ottawa's Spartan Bioscience will be producing a mobile, hand-held testing kit that can tell people quickly if they have COVID-19. The biotechnology company's Spartan Cube is a portable DNA testing technology designed for in-field diagnostic testing, with results in as little as 30 minutes. That's a huge step up from current testing methods and this little machine will perform wonders in the weeks to come. Hopefully, this technology can be adapted to test for a myriad of infectious diseases or viruses and be a vital tool, especially in the field. There are undoubtedly companies out there working at improving the effectiveness and design of protective equipment such as masks, goggles and face shields. There's no doubt we will be seeing more of these in the near future. Masks are commonplace in some countries, and they may find their way in mainstream North American society long after this crisis is over. The plexi shields at grocery stores may become permanent fixtures. Some are better than others, but ultimately, some nice designs will find their way into every check-out line in the world. Several pizza chains have introduced or ramped up the use of "contactless" methods of ordering and delivery. Some have machines, not unlike large vending machines, that dispense your finished pie. Pizza Pizza revealed its "Tamper Proof Pizza Box," which features a safety locking mechanism that is only broken by the customer. Roche Canada has launched the Roche Data Science Coalition, a group of organizations committed to working with the global community to develop solutions to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Roche Canada Data Science Coalition has developed a centralized location for curated publicly available population data sets, which will be gathered from sources across the globe and used to enhance COVID-19 research. This will provide the scientific and research community with a robust foundation for current and future COVID-19 patient-level data work. These are just a few of the measures and advancements that have been born in just a few weeks. All of these not only attest to our ingenuity, but show we can rise out of turmoil and economic crisis and emerge with some powerful new tools and methods. An injection of government funding in medical research will only benefit humankind in the long run. While I'm confident we will emerge from the fog brighter and more efficient, there are some social drawbacks. One worry I have is that we may become even more distanced from our fellow humans in the years to come. Yes, this has been a wake-up call to practice better hygiene and cleanliness. But will the "social distancing" continue and will self-preservation always be at the back of our minds? Will "contactlessness" become our new MO? I had two overnights planned at resorts in April that were cancelled. I had seats for a musical and plans for weekend getaways. Now all I have are daily conferences with Justin, Doug and Dr. Tam. I connect with friends and strangers on Facebook, getting a few chuckles here and there. Just think of all the human interactions we used to make on a daily basis: complaints at the gas pumps, jokes with cashiers, and shooting the breeze with total strangers. There were pleasantries and handshakes and waiting room banter. There were cheers from the stands, drinks at the bar and family dinners marking special occasions. I really hope that when we all bounce back from this, these things will continue. I hope they will all come back with a vengeance and we'll flock to restaurants and coffee shops and salons. For those who can afford it, I'd suggest going on a short spending spree: ordering pizza, getting those lawn and garden supplies, holding backyard barbecues and taking a vacation. When we emerge on the other side of all this, we may not be able to prevent the next pandemic, but we'll be better prepared. We may just appreciate life's little things just that much more. And we may become better neighbours, co-workers, friends and shoppers. I can hardly wait!

