

Lessons from a coronavirus refugee



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Some helpful tips for navigating the 5 phases of this pandemic

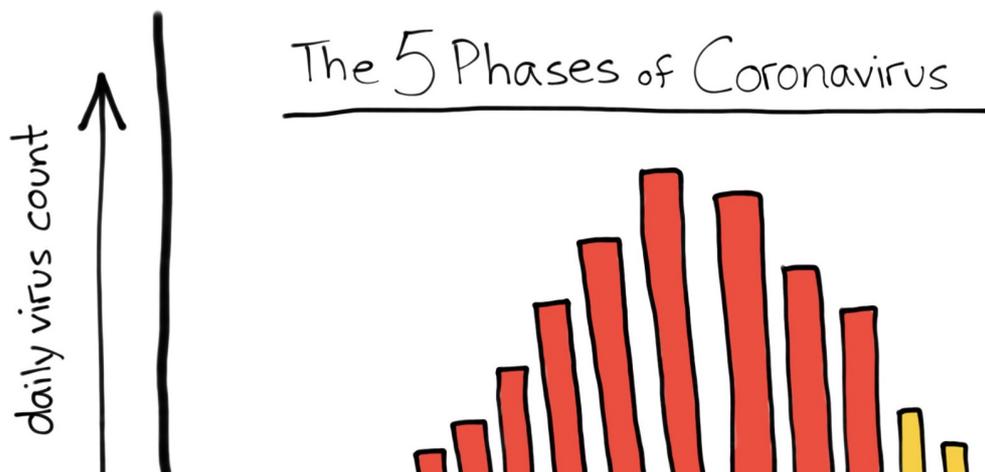
I'm a coronavirus refugee.

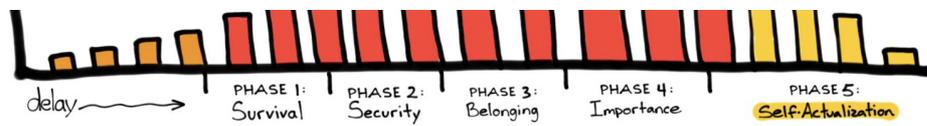
We flew from Shanghai to San Francisco on February 7th. Til then we had been under self-quarantine for 2 weeks in Shanghai. We also did another 2 weeks of quarantine once we arrived to the US.

What unfolded in China throughout January and February was INTENSE. Each day there were depressing developments in the news and fearmongering/panic throughout social media.

Now as the same thing is happening here in the US, I thought it might be helpful to some if I shared some tips on how to BEST handle what's about to go down.

Below I'll separate the tips into the 5 stages that I perceived while going through the crisis in Shanghai.





THE SURVIVAL PHASE

What happened

- First started to hear about the virus in early January
- In mid January it suddenly got real serious
- Hundreds of millions were traveling (Chinese New Year)
- Then in a very short time, entire cities were closed off
- Shanghai went into quarantine but remained open
- Then flights to/from Shanghai started shutting down

How I handled it

- Didn't pay it much mind, was happening far away
- Once they closed off Wuhan I realized it was real serious
- For a week I was in reactive mode, glued to updates
- Panic set in, sleep suffered, and alcohol became my friend

How I wish I handled it

- **Tip #1:** Minimize social media time, and screen time in general if possible
- **Tip #2:** Build a list of what you'd need to remain home for 2 weeks

Key Takeaway

We've got to RIGHT NOW proactively prepare for the long haul. This means make your supplies list then go execute it. Focusing on preparation will help you to get through the survival phase faster. Also, I highly recommend minimizing physical interaction with other

people and ideally don't hang out with your friends. It's just for a few weeks. People can debate how 'severe' that is, but that's what worked in China so.... yea. Up to you.

THE SECURITY PHASE

What happened

- Cities closer to Shanghai began to develop epidemics
- Every day the number of cases in Shanghai grew
- Everyone is wearing a face mask when they're out
- The government sent daily updates via text message
- Heart-wrenching footage started coming out of Wuhan

How I handled it

- Removed myself from a series of groups on Wechat and WhatsApp
- Still glued to the hourly updates of how the virus was spreading at an insane pace
- Armed with masks and disinfectants, we went grocery shopping a block away
- We focused on long shelf-life food like rice, pasta, tuna, that kind of thing
- We started to cook a LOT, and I learned that my cooking is... decent
- No people were allowed to our home and we stopped all deliveries

How I wish I handled it

- **Tip #3:** Freaking out doesn't help your immune system so stop it
- **Tip #4:** Proactively checking in on friends is good for you and them

Key Takeaway

Now that your core preparation is done, you can finally unwind and spend more mindful time with your family or roommates or pets. Chances are you'll be spending significantly more time together than before so a) be patient with one another, and b) do mini-activities

together. One really big difference between quarantine here and in Shanghai is that here you can still go hiking, camping, etc. Best quarantine ever!

THE BELONGING PHASE

What happened

- The virus now seemed to be spreading globally
- The extent of the business impact was starting to be seen
- New rules were issued every day to help people & businesses
- Outpouring of support for the frontline health care workers
- Residences started to bar non-residents from entering

How I handled it

- The new normal settled in: lots of time at home with family
- My 16 month daughter looooved having us both home + grandma
- Still followed the updates but was with less frequency ('only' 10x daily)
- Chatting with friends became really important, and deeper too
- Started to get involved with initiatives to support businesses in need
- Reached out to customers to see how we could help their remote teams
- Used the alone time to do more strategic planning and big thinking

How I wish I handled it

- **Tip #5:** Reframe the quarantine as being 'in jail' to having more 'you time'
- **Tip #6:** Build a family schedule to help everyone stay positive and active

Key Takeaway

This is where things get interesting, when the new normal settles in. For a lot of people the work or studies won't stop, so balancing this with the 24/7 family-time could be tough.

Once you can get the right balance that works for you, notice how the new normal feels kind of good. Self-quarantine is GREAT for your health because a) you can't get sick, and b) it gives you times to think. These are good things.

THE IMPORTANCE PHASE

What happened

- The US restricted travel from China
- The UK recommended British people to leave China
- 99% of the population across China is quarantined at home
- In Shanghai there's still freedom of movement and no shortages
- ...except for masks and hand sanitizer, they were harder to get
- The holidays were extended so people didn't get have to go to work
- For lots of families this marked the most time they've spent together
- There was an explosion in remote work adoption by companies

How I handled it

- Seized any opportunity to help a friend or customer
- We deployed questionnaires, designed reports, and created videos
- Collaborated on solutions for entrepreneurs, e.g. an online marketplace
- Some of our online engagement projects became Coronavirus-related
- My pregnant wife and I decided to fly to the US with our daughter
- We were on the 2nd to last direct flight out of Shanghai
- Anxiety started to build again in the 7–10 days leading up to our flight

How I wish I handled it

- **Tip #7:** Offer promotions if your solution is “remote friendly”

- **Tip #8:** Don't be like me and let your dietary & workout discipline go to 0

Key Takeaway

Having passed through the survival, security, and belonging phases, you've experienced a lot of change in a short period of time. This is actually a recipe for potential transformation, so be mindful of any new ideas that may bubble up about your preferred ways of working or living. You may have also developed deeper relationships with family or colleagues since having undergone a crisis together. Cherish that.

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THE SELF-ACTUALIZATION PHASE

What happened

- Companies in China are back online, with many operating remotely
- Companies in the US are beginning to make contingency plans in case...
- Teachers begin to prescribe LOADS of homework for the parents to manage
- Everyday there are more and more cases across more countries
- Facebook suddenly wakes up to the risk of an epidemic here in the US
- Shanghai has virtually no more cases, even Wuhan is past the peak
- Returnees are required to quarantine for 2 weeks
- The US declares a state of emergency

How I handled it

- More video conferencing with customers and friends
- Better rhythm of project management and internal communication
- Preparing a new service to support organizations affected by the virus
- Minimal contact with people outside my family & stopped paying by cash
- Now preparing for a long recovery cycle, i.e. planning for a recession

- Secured a backup option for our baby's delivery here in the US
- Sharing with friends in the US how China was able to stem the virus' spread

How I wish I handled it

- **Tip #9:** Assume that this might take 6 months to get back to normal
- **Tip #10:** Leverage the rapid change to accelerate work/lifestyle changes

Key Takeaway

As the panic and number of new cases begin to subside, life will slowly adjust to the new normal. We'll all remain vigilant and thankful for having emerged largely unscathed by a potentially devastating pandemic. The economic impact will be severe and reverberate throughout 2020 and beyond. A distressed economy brings with it opportunities, so look for ways you can layer your new ways of working/living as things unfold.

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SUMMARY

- **Tip #1:** Minimize social media time, and screen time in general if possible
- **Tip #2:** Build a list of what you'd need to remain home for 2 weeks
- **Tip #3:** Freaking out doesn't help your immune system so stop it
- **Tip #4:** Proactively checking in on friends is good for you and them
- **Tip #5:** Reframe the quarantine as being 'in jail' to having more 'you time'
- **Tip #6:** Build a family schedule to help everyone stay positive and active
- **Tip #7:** Offer promotions if your solution is "remote friendly"
- **Tip #8:** Don't be like me and let your dietary & workout discipline go to 0
- **Tip #9:** Assume that this might take 6 months to get back to normal
- **Tip #10:** Leverage the rapid change to accelerate work/lifestyle changes

From the panic of being in survival mode to the accomplishment of successfully navigating the crisis, your own experience may or may not follow mine.

But one thing is for sure: China beat this thing through extreme vigilance, i.e. EVERYONE STAYED HOME. No friends, no colleagues, no nothing. Not in person anyway.

Another thing that's pretty certain is that there'll be a lot of change that's about to go down. This may even represent a major watershed moment (on par with 9/11) that will forever change the world.

Change brings opportunity. So while you stay extremely vigilant to remain safe, you should also keep your eyes peeled and hearts open for new opportunities that might just change your life.

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