

IT'S NOT OVER UNTIL IT'S OVER:

THE PERILS OF DECLARING VICTORY IN CRISIS TOO SOON

COVID CRISIS RULE #7: IT IS NOT OVER JUST BECAUSE YOU WANT IT TO BE.

Do you remember that ill-starred speech in the middle of the Iraq War, when President George Bush stood on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, with a banner hung behind him that announced ["Mission Accomplished"](#)?

Of course, the mission had not been accomplished. In fact, guerrilla warfare escalated and the vast majority of casualties in the Iraq war occurred after the speech had already been given. The whole affair turned into a huge embarrassment that President Bush later called one of the bigger mistakes of his career.

It turned into a global symbol of the triumph of wishful thinking over the truth.

But the President wanted the war to be over; everyone did. There were

indications that it was winding down. And frankly, the war that started as apparent revenge for 9/11 had become such a political hot potato that he needed it to be over. The ambiguity was simply insupportable politically and practically, and so everyone jumped on a lie as if it were a lifeline.

SOUND FAMILIAR?

Of course, we are in the middle of making another such mistake, and it is a classic crisis management mistake that can hurt us even more: This pandemic is not over, and we pretend it is at our peril.

Right now, we are speaking from both sides of our mouths when on one hand we talk about the resurgence of the new Delta variants of Covid decimating towns and unvaccinated populations in this country and around the world, and on the other hand continue to endorse abandoning masks, working from the office 100% of the time, and opening up arenas and music events and lecture halls with no social distancing needed.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

This cognitive dissonance leaves us all reeling, unsure of what to do and who to believe. Once again, government has lost credibility, and trust — acting precipitously to announce strictures had

been lifted, then giving us conflicting guidance as the variants proliferate, and yet again putting it all back on us to figure out our own paths.

Businesses are struggling through the ambiguity — making plans and pronouncements about coming back to work that they now fear won't be able to last. And the general public simply doesn't know whether it's running headlong into a Roaring 20's recovery, or the fourth wave. Or, third-and-a-half, perhaps?

Several days ago, the husband of one of my friends — a fit and handsome man in his 60's — got incredibly sick when they were at a restaurant. They went home right way. He went to bed early, and yes, it turned out to be Covid — a Delta variant. Both he and my friend were thoroughly vaccinated months ago. But he is on the brink of hospitalization now, and maybe worse. They are learning the lesson first-hand that a crisis is not over just because you want it to be, and that you cannot trust those who tell you otherwise.

AMBIGUITY

No one likes living in ambiguity. Certainty soothes, even when it's ugly. Ambiguity is painful, disquieting, harmful in a whole different way. And in convoluted, multifaceted crises such as

Covid, we crave winners and losers, beginnings and endings, and above all clarity.

But clarity is in short supply. And embracing false clarity can lead a crisis into deeper levels of hell.

One of my inviolate crisis rules is that it is never over just because you want it to be. Or need it to be. Or just can't stand it for one more nanosecond. It ends when it ends. And more often it peters out, more with a whimper than a bang. We rarely get the comfort of an "armistice."

SO WHERE ARE WE?

The moral of crisis rule #7 is that it is not yet time for us to relax. We need to pace ourselves, build physical, social, and psychological immunity, vaccinate, eat fruit. We need to let reality dictate our decisions, not delusion or even wishful thinking.

It is no where near time to declare victory, or mission accomplished. Many of us are still unvaccinated, and that is a tragedy because it puts us all further at risk. And, despite what the pundits of spin tell you, those who have been vaccinated can still get sick. Maybe not always as sick — but sick. The thing about 85 percent efficacy is that a full 15 percent are still unprotected.

So, if we are concerned about our mortality, we should still be avoiding crowds, wearing masks, not sneezing or coughing in one another's faces, and in general taking care of one another. And, of course, [getting ourselves and everyone we know vaccinated](#). Because yet again, we declared victory too soon.

And beyond all, we need to demand of our leaders and health leaders that they not obscure the risks while trying to accommodate our need to get back to life as usual. The more we live in obfuscation, the more open we can become to false certainty...and the

more we can be scammed, one way or another.

As my friend Dr. Lieve Franzen, a European Union official, physician and public health expert working in some of the most difficult regions for covid prevention in the world, says, "This pandemic is not over. We are still only in the middle."

Be ready.

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