IFEA PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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'MISSION CONTROL, WE HAVE A PROBLEM.'

In the midst of the current global pandemic, with many things to hold our attention as we attempt to navigate the unknown and unexpected thrown at our world and our industry, while trying to understand and wrap our minds around the growing impact of the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) on our events, teams, stakeholders and communities, an important anniversary occurred in April that I think we can draw a number of lessons from.

The following is taken from a factual article on Apollo 13 by Chelsea Gohd, Staff Writer for Space.com.

Fifty years ago, on April 11th, 1970, three astronauts aboard Apollo 13 launched into space, poised to be the next humans to walk on the moon. But things didn't exactly go according to plan.

At 2:13 p.m. EST (1813 GMT) on April 11, 1970, commander James "Jim" Lovell, command module pilot John "Jack" Swigert and lunar module pilot Fred Haise took off without a hitch from Launch Complex 39A at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida. The astronauts were on their way to the moon. But about 56 hours into the mission, things went seriously awry.

The crew, who had just finished a television broadcast from aboard the command module, nicknamed Odyssey, noticed a slight drop in cabin pressure. Swigert went to see what was going on and check on the service module's oxygen tanks.

The crew heard a loud bang coming from outside and Swigert uttered the famous line: "Okay Houston, we've had a problem here."

Jack R. Lousma, the mission's communication link between the astronauts and flight controllers (the "CAPCOM"), asked the crew to repeat the transmission, and Lovell responded: "Uh, Houston, we've had a problem." (The phrase is often remembered as "Houston (Mission Control), we have a problem," but that line was just some movie magic from actor Tom Hanks, who played Lovell in the film "Apollo 13.")

It turned out that electrical shorts in the fan circuit in cryogenic oxygen tank 2 ignited wire insulation, causing the tank to heat up and become pressurized, eventually exploding. The tank explosion was so intense that it blasted off a chunk of the service module. As a result of this explosion, power and oxygen quickly started to drop and, all of a sudden, things were a matter of life or death.

The possibility of a moon landing quickly fell out of focus as the astronauts and NASA ground crew had to immediately start brainstorming and working together to save the astronaut's lives. They decided to power down the crew module, as they would need to preserve it for re-entry, and they evacuated to the lunar module, nicknamed Aquarius, and used it as a "lifeboat" out in space.

They planned to travel around the far side of the moon and use the moon's orbit as a "slingshot" to help them get back to Earth. Mission Control was concerned that, if they were to instead just turn around and head straight back, their engine (they weren't sure how damaged it was) might not be able to make it.

But Aquarius was only meant to carry two astronauts down to the lunar surface and back, and now it was carting three grown men around the far side of the moon. This posed a number of issues as, not only were the astronauts cramped, they noticed that carbon dioxide levels were starting to rise in the air.

Lithium hydroxide canisters aboard both the lunar module and the command module were designed to "scrub" or remove carbon dioxide from the air. But the canisters on Aquarius couldn't handle the extra carbon dioxide from a third passenger. The crew acted quickly, grabbing other canisters from the command module, but those canisters were a different shape and didn't quite fit into the air filtration system aboard Aquarius.

But the crew needed to make it work, so they used things including spacesuit hoses, plastic bags, a sock and duct tape. Eventually, they got the canisters from the command module to fit in Aquarius. And, voila: a do-it-yourself air filtration system.

About an hour before they reentered Earth's atmosphere, the team jettisoned the lunar module, saying goodbye to the capsule that kept them alive during their unbelievable journey around the moon.

After bidding adieu to Aquarius, the crew buckled into Odyssey and prepared for an intense re-entry and descent. Ionized air around the module created a complete communication blackout for over four minutes as the craft was descending. NASA still thought that there could be an issue with the craft's parachutes or shields and was anxiously waiting to hear from the astronauts.

So, when the crew finally re-established contact with NASA and let them know that they'd splashed down safely and successfully in the Pacific Ocean on April 17, everyone breathed a heavy sigh of relief.

As I considered the unanticipated and unexpected plight of the Apollo 13 mission and crew – one which no risk management plan or operational alternative had been written for – I couldn't help but to correlate that with our own current situation.

We all launched into 2020 anticipating a great year ahead for our events. With new goals and visions; staff and volunteers and

suppliers and sponsors at the ready; operational and marketing plans in place; all systems were 'good-to-go'. But in early March (February 27th was the last IFEA Event Insider issue not solely focused on the impact of the COVID-19 Coronavirus), we all started to feel the 'drop in cabin pressure' and watched a little closer the news of this new and quickly evolving pandemic. Our 'loud bang' was perhaps on March 6th when the South by Southwest (SXSW) Festival in Austin, Texas was cancelled by their city officials, followed it seemed, very quickly, by many more global postponements and cancellations of festivals and events – small and large - as the world, and our industry, worked to wrap their arms around this new challenge.

'Failure is not an Option.'
– Gene Kranz

And in our own mission scenario, while we are still working together with our global professional peers to define the right combination of duct tape, socks and plastic bags that will get us safely through this stressful and trying time in history, I also reflected on the famous quote by Apollo 13 NASA Flight Director for Mission Control, Gene Kranz, who pointed out clearly to everyone that "failure is not an option."

Nor is it now. And just as the crew of Apollo 13 and the team of Mission Control were a testament to the human spirit and incredible ingenuity of their peers and profession, I believe, with no hesitation or doubt, that we and all of our global professional peers are up to this challenge. *(You will read about some of their insights throughout this issue of 'ie')*

As we continue to collect and share information, with an eye on returning our events and communities 'back home,' if we rely on our experience; rely on our global peers and partners; and rely on our unparalleled creativity, ingenuity, and leadership; we will succeed in surviving this crisis, no matter the length of the journey. And just as the crew of Apollo 13 planned to use the moon's orbit to 'slingshot' themselves back to earth, I believe that our collective efforts will strengthen all of our events and all those in our industry, making us better prepared, more resilient, more creative, and with a larger and more active global network than ever before, effectively 'slingshotting' our industry into the future.

And following our safe return through the unimaginable - whatever the world we return to may look like, for both events and communities - we all know that the first thing people will want to do is to celebrate. And we will be ready for launch.

The IFEA will be here for all of you and your events and communities throughout this challenging time, as we work to negotiate our own successful path, just as you are doing. Please share with us your creativity and successes, as well as your needs and challenges, along the way. Your continued membership and support are appreciated.