



'ENOUGH, ALREADY'

I consider myself to be a fairly strong person; as I assume many of you do of yourselves. Stress and pressure and deadlines – that I control to a large degree – are the world I have always lived in. I have always enjoyed a strong foundation and network of family and friends and professional peers to provide that peace-of-mind, love, humor, support, and encouragement to get me through most of life's challenges, as I hope that I help to provide, reciprocally, to all of them. I have my health, a comfortable home (which has doubled as my office for the last year), and the basics for safety, sustenance and sustainability. And I get to work, every day, in/on behalf of an industry that positively touches almost every life on the planet (when it is operational). So never mistake how thankful I am for all that I have and enjoy. But while I try to be among the realistic optimists, I have to admit that the world is starting to test me.

A year ago, I was writing this letter and paying tribute to my best friend, who lost a hard-fought battle with cancer. Today, as I write this letter, we must pay tribute to the 2.3 million-plus lives lost globally (469,358+ of those in the United States) to COVID-19. All of whom were someone's best friend, or spouse, or parent, or sibling, or professional peer. A number that seemed unimaginable long before it reached the continually ticking levels that it has reached to date. And we must never forget to extend our most heartfelt sympathies to all those who have lost someone

dear to them. Individuals, who were all likely hoping to leave their mark on the world.

The last year (with no clearly definable end yet in view and often what feels like teleopsia, with our goals seeming to get further away, rather than closer, on some days) has placed us all in a precarious position, on many fronts, that we had never experienced before. A position that has changed and challenged – well outside of our control (my least favorite position to be in) – our families, our professional lives, our communities, our countries, our world, and

each of us, individually. And because it is happening to everyone, around the globe, even our dependable support networks have become a bit frayed. It is harder to be supportive and empathetic of others when you are knee deep in your own battles.

And to be sure, as we have seen across the globe, the common challenge of a global health pandemic has not necessarily united our world in getting through things together, like some global and national challenges throughout history have succeeded in doing, but instead, has often served as a divider. If anything, our pandemic stress has only raised our stress in other areas – politics; social and human rights; education; health and safety concerns; financial, housing and food security; and the list goes on.

As Type-A event personalities, we not only want and try to control everything, but we often feel like everyone else thinks that we should already have control of everything. We are used to being that leader who assures others that everything is under control; who has all the answers. 'We' should be able to define unlimited financial resource pools; to not only keep our current sponsors (who are all going through the same pandemic that we are) fully in-tact, but be recruiting new ones, as well, despite having no active assets to sell; to avoid having to cut positions and staff and friends; to add a plethora of new pandemic safety expense lines to our budgets, with no new revenue lines to offset them; to control the media coverage for our events and cities and global regions, ensuring everyone that 'we' have it all under control, even if others do not; and to be experts in areas that we have never had to know about before – government financial support programs; pandemic health requirements; virtual business and production technology programs; managing our staffs and organizations at a distance; and more.

Over the last year, and growing as the pandemic impact continues into 2021, I have watched and experienced, firsthand, as the pressures mount on everyone. We were all pretty confident that we could get successfully through 2020 (the year we all learned to hate), even when things did not go our direction. We turned to our 'rainy day' reserves (for those fortunate enough to have them); used our creativity to create virtual placeholders for our festivals and events; planned for what we may need to know 'next year' when things returned to normal; adjusted (as did our families) to working from home, tutored our kids (who are staying home now, too); 'pivoted' our products, services and other assets to keep our businesses afloat in the 'short-term'; and hoped, every day, for a light at the end of the tunnel.

But when the calendar pages turned and the New Year celebrations weren't even allowed to be as celebratory as we all wanted them to be, a new reality set in. Instead of preparing to present the 'bigger and better' version of our returning events that we had promised in our 2020 news releases, we started the year out with a seeming (and literal in some places) mudslide of cancellations being announced for the second year in a row. Optimistic predictions by some very visible leaders in the live events field, were being backtracked. Expectations for vaccine rollouts and 'herd immunity' are being adjusted daily (with still no 'hard-and-fast' date for a return to normalcy) and even approved

government support programs around the world have been very slow in coming through or being clearly interpreted, as our elected officials try to figure out a world that they (remember) have not been through before, either.

Given all of the above, I think we all – and all those whom we deal with and care for everyday – would not be faulted if we raised up our voices in unison and screamed, **"ENOUGH, ALREADY!"**

(Insert a deep breath and perhaps a day off here.)

So, now that I have used this letter to share some of my own pent-up stresses, and I hope for all of you to stop for a moment to take stock of the incredibly challenging world that we are all living in and maneuvering through right now, it is time for us all, collectively, to refocus on the realities that we must still find our way through, moving forward. We are still the leaders who can do that, even when we don't have all of the answers.

It is time for us to join the messaging for getting us more quickly through this 'novel' pandemic. To use our bases and influence – locally, nationally, and globally – to encourage people to get vaccinated; to wear masks; and to safe-distance. To help us save events for everyone.

It is time, as our allied live event venue associations have taken the lead on, to provide facility and staffing support to help maximize a safe and timely vaccination process.

It is time for us to further extend our brain trusts and task forces in support of one another, our communities, and our industry (events, cities, suppliers, young professionals, educators, et al.), in addition to the potential sharing of our own assets and resources, as that may be possible and feasible, to help others. All for one; One for all. We are in this together.

And while I/we don't have all of the answers (even while we still feel on most days that we should) I can assure you that the IFEA will be here to provide the critical outlets and opportunities to share your ideas and knowledge and expertise; to vent your frustrations (our most valuable benefit on some days is just to listen); to celebrate your successes (no matter how small); to expand your professional, global networks; to enhance your education; and to help you stay up-to-date on the latest resources, tools, training, global news coverage, and peer event operational reactions and responses; as we make our way successfully – together - through the months and year ahead.

And, perhaps most importantly, to serve as a reminder of the essential role that each of you, and our collective industry, continues to play. **When** we find ourselves on the other side of this pandemic and given the green light to gather safely once more, I believe, more than ever, that the critical role and ability of our industry to bond our communities, cities, and world back together again will be more important than it has ever been in our lifetimes and professional careers. Not simply for the purpose of gathering without health concerns, but to remind the world of who we are when we are at our best; of who we are when we are one; and of what we can produce when we all work together.

That will really be something to celebrate!

Hang in there and stay safe and healthy.