



# today:tomorrow

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# THERE IS NO BACK OF HOUSE / FRONT OF HOUSE; EVERYTHING COMMUNICATES.

Sometimes it is difficult to categorize things. We have long created expertise within expertise within specialization. But in real life the work we take on doesn't respect clean boundaries. Things overlap and combine with nuance. Complexity requires us to think across interconnected systems. This is also the case as we codify insights into how business and civil society are responding to COVID-19.

In my recent contribution to *Forbes*, [Note to Companies and Brands: Don't Speak Up, Step Up](#), I shared some patterns I am seeing in how brands are responding to the crisis. It's no longer enough to weather the financial storm, protecting employees and shareholder value. Customers, workers, and shareholders alike want to know what companies are doing to contribute to the greater good. How they're stepping up to fill gaps left by local and national governments.

I'm also seeing more blurring between straight philanthropy and brand strategy. **A few things to consider:**

When a company sets up a fund to cover the basic needs of its employees and their families during the crisis—as [Comcast](#), [Booz Allen](#), and others have done—is that philanthropy or a new form of *employee-based universal basic income*?

When [Crocs](#) donates 10,000 pairs of shoes to healthcare workers, is it philanthropy, product placement, or a thank-you to some of its most loyal customers?

When [Rolls-Royce](#), [Airbus](#), and [Microsoft](#) team up to produce ventilators, is that philanthropy or an evolution of the sort of *private-public partnerships* we haven't seen since [GE](#) teamed with NASA on Apollo 11?



On July 24, 1969, President Richard Nixon welcomes the quarantined Apollo 11 astronauts, Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Buzz Aldrin, aboard the U.S.S. Hornet after the historic lunar landing mission.

When Indian startup [Oyo Hotels & Homes](#) offers accommodations for free or at sharply reduced rates to healthcare workers battling the COVID-19 crisis, is that philanthropy or PR?

When [Starbucks](#) pays workers for 30 days, even if they don't show up for work, is it philanthropy or an expansion of sick leave?

When [Zoom](#) gives its video platform to K–12 schools for free, is it philanthropy or smart early acquisition marketing to a next generation of business customers? Or is it the *birth of a new utility infrastructure*?

What we know for sure is that what used to be considered PR-worthy corporate social responsibility is now business as usual. And that's a good thing. For a growing number of companies, a corporate purpose is no longer a line or two to emblazon on a



Homeschooling, 2020-style

website and forget about; it now sits at the heart of the business—serving as a guide for big decisions.

In my piece [Will Isolation Bring Us Back Together?](#) I reflected on the irony that all this social distancing may be strengthening interpersonal connections. George Monbiot shared a similar sentiment with his article [The horror films got it wrong. This virus has turned us into caring neighbors.](#) I do think our sense of community has been heightened. We've come to recognize and appreciate the formal and informal structures that connect us. Our business associates aren't associates at all; they are our work families. Those essential workers are our heroes; delivery drivers, our lifelines.

Within my own organization, I've been crossing categories to communicate across the digital chasm:

**One-to-One Connects:** I've made endless calls, checking in on people who probably thought, "Why is she calling me?" because I do worry about everyone and about sustaining a sense of optimism and purpose through these long days and nights.

**Gratitude + Micro-Celebration:** I am more mindful about thanking those colleagues who are tackling minute by minute the challenge of ensuring wellness across the company and its people and especially our business continuity, which funds everything good we do. Our internal communications team is activating a number of programs to reinforce a sense of community across geographies.

**Training, Upskilling, and “Upsharing”:** I’ve encouraged my team to take advantage of the downtime some are experiencing to accelerate professional development. We’ve initiated a series of master classes that further animate a *Communication Manifesto* book we published last year. The sessions will be led by my 12+ leadership team, giving them practice in sharing insights, teaching, and leading while more junior team members benefit from an added dose of content, direction, and connection.

## “What used to be considered PR-worthy corporate social responsibility is now business as usual.”

**Authenticity + Managed Expectations:** In internal comms, we’re striking a balance between optimism and candor. We’re managing employees’ expectations about what the new normal might be, what it can mean, and how we can turn a crisis into a valuable reset.

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APRIL 2020



Together with their friends and son Adam, Aaron and Emily Sherinian have founded [Quarantine Academy](#) to educate, inspire, and connect young people during the COVID-19 crisis.



# Marian Salzman

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## FEATURED ARTICLES

### Forbes

#### [Will Isolation Bring Us Back Together?](#)

Times of crisis bring out the worst and best in humanity. COVID-19 has brought us “pop-up generosity.”

#### [Note to Companies and Brands: Don't Speak Up, Step Up](#)

Don't feel compelled to fill a communications void that doesn't exist. Demonstrate through your actions that you care.

#### [How About We Try Being 'All in This Together' on Social Media, Too?](#)

One of the many consequences of COVID-19 has been the chance it offers us to rethink, recalibrate, and reframe our lives.

### Medium

#### [Balancing Work from Wherever](#)

Don't be surprised if this virus results in greater flexibility from employers once we've emerged on the other side.

#### [COVID-19 Be Damned: Rituals and Traditions Will Not Be Denied](#)

Easter and Passover feasts might not be as lavish this year, but I'm thinking they might be packed with more meaning and a better understanding of what the holidays commemorate.

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