

SOMETIMES, SUFFERING YIELDS NEW IDEAS

Many people come to new realizations after a major life crisis: a cancer diagnosis, the death of a child or spouse, a divorce — or losing a job. And though the emotional and financial supports for these crises vary, many times the events representing life and death are conjoined.

Health crises make it difficult to work. The loss of a spouse to death or divorce can create financial strain. Loss of a job and income can spike stress, precipitating relationship woes or severe health problems.

In 2020, as a nation, the United States has suffered the link between health risks and loss of income that were once part of a family's rather than the nation's collective experience. By the end of May, *The New York Times* reported "US jobless claims pass 40 million" while *The Guardian* reported "54 million people in the US could go hungry" in 2020, including nearly 25 percent of US children.

Suffering can often produce new ideas. The Great Depression prompted Social Security, a program that has helped many survive the current storm. But lessons from the past are too often forgotten, as Lou Uchitelle reminds us in *The Disposable American*. Despite some measure of national resilience, hopelessness has increased in the collective psyche as the number of families who have suffered job loss traumas mounts. In recent years, there have been calls for a basic income and income insurance, which both go beyond current unemployment measures.

Reflection and learning are key to seeing things in a new light. But to gain benefit from the depths of our experiences, we need to grant people the space to mourn, to contemplate, to regroup and see anew.

This is not a luxury society can afford to give to just a few.

"Aha" moments — instances of insight and learning — come not when we are rattled but when we have the confidence to accept that it is OK not to know. And there can be joy, that kind of wonder in learning, without judgment or self-reproach, that perhaps we had as young children, before a parent, teacher, peer, or colleague shamed us, mocking: "You didn't know that?"

The truth is, we all know extraordinarily little. Months into the pandemic, we still know only a small bit about COVID-19.

But it could transform the world and ourselves if we were all to admit that what we each know is a sand grain on the beach.

Most of my new understandings at work have come out of either actively questioning, learning, or studying something new — or suffering a defeat and taking time to think about it. Sometimes, these studies have changed my views and recharged my career. How about you?



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