



# PERSPECTIVES

by Rinaldo S. Brutoco



*Rinaldo S. Brutoco is the Founding President and CEO of the Santa Barbara-based World Business Academy and co-founder of JUST Capital. He's a serial entrepreneur, executive, author, radio host, and futurist who's published on the role of business in relation to pressing moral, environmental, and social concerns for over 35 years.*

## Why Are We Here?

My wife and I have significant comorbidity issues that would be extremely dangerous were we to contract Covid-19. Many of us have been self-quarantined since mid-February with no end in sight. Why are we here?

California started way behind New York in experiencing large pandemic infections only to pass it. Why are we here? Santa Barbara County Supervisor Chairman, Gregg Hart, laments that we need to get local businesses up and running but recognizes it won't happen until the virus is under control. We had over 80 new cases in Santa Barbara county last Thursday. While New York had only 39 deaths and 953 new cases the day I write this, California had 157 deaths and 10,032 new cases. Yes, ten times as many new cases in California as New York. Why are we here? Every other modern western industrial democracy in Europe, the Pacific, and Asia have gotten Covid-19 under control. The United States continues to be the plague pariah state that isn't even allowed to fly to Europe. We know we could get the pandemic under control in weeks if we just copy other countries that have already done so. None waited for a vaccine. There is no secret formula—so why are we here?

Fortunately, the answer to that question is simple: we're here because of a failure of local, state, and federal political leadership. In those countries with good political leadership, the virus has been tamed. They are now on their way to safely re-opening. In the US we are flailing away with a crisis that deepens every day causing the collapse of hospital systems. In the US, the virus death toll is crossing 150,000, known infections exceed 4,330,000, and structural damage to our economy is deepening. Even a significant majority of Republicans agree that President Trump has “botched” it. It's a comment on how badly we need federal leadership in order to get to some version of a “new normal.” And, although Mr. Trump has begun to acknowledge the problems created by the mixed messaging on re-opening states too quickly, the continued “push” to prematurely re-open schools is as failed a political strategy as holding the Republican Convention in Jacksonville. Fortunately, many states will ignore the Administration even as we mourn the death of a nine-year-old girl in Florida last week and express concern for our teachers, students, and families. Failed attempts to re-open commerce has backfired in every state it was tried, including California. A similar failure will await any school district unwise enough to prematurely send children back to classrooms.

In those states with good political leadership, the virus is now coming under control. Governor Cuomo showed us how to do it. Governor Newsom choose to ignore his example either out of personal pride or a terribly flawed political miscalculation. Either way, we went from relatively safe to daily death leader.

Unlike Governor Cuomo and the governors of New Jersey and Connecticut who have banded together to require visitors from outside their states to quarantine themselves for 14 days, Governor

Newsom has yet to issue an order requiring epicenter residents of Los Angeles to stay at home and quit travelling to Santa Barbara where they have become a major source of new infections. That incompetence on his part is absolutely destructive to vacation communities that are hit with new waves of infected people visiting on weekends as a “get away” from their epicenter of infection. For those who cheer these weekend invasions as a way to get our restaurants and hotels filled, don't miss the fact that we've been forced to roll back to “no inside dining” because we allowed the virus to get out of control, thereby further delaying our return to normal commerce. Here is an inescapable axiom: this virus does not respect politics. It is also an axiom that commerce cannot effectively re-emerge until after the pandemic is brought under control.

So, how do we get there? You've already heard from every health expert. The answer is simple: 1) everyone has to wear a face mask. Period; 2) Everyone needs to social distance; 3) Everyone has to maintain personal hygiene; and 4) Everyone should stay at home as much as possible to minimize social “spread.” How long will it take for us to get the virus under control if we follow those four simple rules: only four to eight weeks. We don't have to wait for a vaccine or a miracle cure, although both would be welcome. We have to be individually responsible for returning society to health, and definitely before we send our children back to school which would be another form of premature re-opening that would launch yet another wave of infection. That's how we get from HERE to THERE!

Fortunately, the business community is providing some leadership. A number of national chains are requesting face masks be worn in order to shop. And, virtually all of our local businesses are doing the same—try walking into your favorite establishment without a mask and watch how fast you have to retreat. Pierre La Fond lead the way in our community to protect their employees, and all of us customers. Smart move. I notice they are really busy. Good for you. And good for all the restaurants that have begun serving outside and increasing take out deliveries as a practical way to get some business and protect their customers' health. These business initiatives are vital and are already having a positive impact. Now, if we could just get our local political leaders to enforce our mask wearing ordinances... You see, it works better and faster if we all wear masks—so let's get going! Don't you want this nightmare to end?

So, how do we avoid anything like this crisis again? Well, this is our City, our County, our State, and our Nation. “We the people” have the collective responsibility to vote as never before in these challenging times to elect better political leadership. So, to end this nightmare, and never again ask, “Why are we here?” we have to take personal responsibility to wear masks and vote for effective political leadership. Please remember that when the next election arises about 100 days from now.