

Our Condescending and Judgmental Behaviour During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Shôn Ellerton, April 16, 2020

Just like the bushfire crisis in Australia, the COVID-19 pandemic provides the perfect breeding ground for condescending and judgmental behaviour towards each other.



During the Easter weekend and throughout the following week, South Australia announced that it would extend shopping hours and relax restrictions placed on wineries, cellar doors, breweries and distilleries allowing them to re-open for business but only on a take-away basis. South Australia has had a very low *reported* case count of those infected with the Coronavirus along with a death count of only four suggesting that, perhaps, it might be time to re-introduce some normality as it slowly ebbs back to life from the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak.

In my opinion, the decisions made by the South Australian government have been logical, practical and, considering the draconian decisions made by the other Australian states and countries with respect to enforced lockdown, quite sustainable. In general, South Australians have been proactively observing the hygiene and social-distancing practices and, to boot, adopting better general hygiene practices than ever before. To the credit of Australia, its main cities, in my opinion, are remarkably clean compared with those cities in Europe I previously lived in. Very little evidence of chip wrappers strewn about in public squares. Relatively clean public conveniences. Clean public transportation. Strict food-handling arrangements in restaurants and marketplaces. And, of course, clean air and water. I strongly believe this plays a big factor in reducing the spread of the virus. And finally, Australia's border strict control protection

and relatively sparse population makes a deciding difference as to the potentially rapid spread of COVID-19.

South Australia's current set of decisions not to implement enforced lockdowns, to encourage those at home to get out and do a little hiking and get some exercise, to exercise judgment whether it really is necessary for you and your children to go to school and, ultimately, not to treat the citizenry as an unruly gang of children who need to be watched over and scolded or fined for any opportunity which might be considered an 'unessential' activity is, I believe, the most workable solution balancing health and economy. Many businesses and individuals may never recover from this crisis and that is, regrettably, a sad reality that is being materialised out of all this.

It is also a time not to condemn policies or the actions committed by others reactively *without* thinking of why they are being drawn out or committed. Politicians are never unanimously applauded for their decisions and actions, and living in a society of relatively free speech, we often encounter gripes and outright anger on social media for just about any action taken. For example, when the Premier of South Australia announced on Facebook that opening hours would be extended over the Easter period, there was an outpouring from many that what he was doing was highly irresponsible and that there should be a complete lockdown. I can only presume that many of those who said this had done their share of hoarding beforehand along with an [*I'm Alright Jack*](#) mentality depriving many others of getting what they need.

Another example I recall is when the Australian government announced that childcare would be free during this crisis. Just as predicted, a swarm of posts came out from those denouncing the initiative as unfair for the taxpayer, and equally predictable, they often have no children of their own. The whole issue of whether to close schools or not has been deliberated and debated intensely from the start. Naturally, most of those with no children to look after vehemently opposed the notion that schools should remain open at all. Next in line are those households in which one breadwinner could work from home while the spouse or partner can look after the kids at home within a spacious and comfortable environment. Many families do not have spacious and comfortable environments, a very important piece of knowledge which many, staggeringly, just do not even think about at all. How about working moms and dads who have no choice but to work or those cramped into tiny apartments?

South Australia, as an example, took the logical decision to allow schools to remain open for those parents who need them.

During crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Australian bushfires, an unhealthy behaviour of over-glorifying and denigrating various positions or roles in society becomes the meeting point of many a discussion. Which roles are useful? Which roles are not? As much as I am grateful for the health sector and to those who work in it, there are many others in the frontline who are usually not even thought about as being on the frontline. Greengrocers, truck drivers, IT professionals (unless you don't need your Internet and access to your bank or your credit cards), mailmen, public transportation drivers, mechanics, firefighters (oh yes, fires still happen). Civil and mechanical engineers, radio equipment specialists (to keep your mobile phone working), anyone working in the water and energy sectors, policemen and other security personnel, the list goes on. Even professions which many of us consider as being largely useless in a crisis, for example, music, sports and arts have a part to play in our rich social tapestry in some way. I come across too many posts on Facebook claiming that 'such-and-such' are the true heroes. In early January, firefighters were the heroes; now they are nurses. Such condescending behaviour reminds me of the passage in George Orwell's [1984](#) in which an authoritarian voice on loudspeakers in the work canteen in which Winston was dining was blaring out, 'Think of all the soldiers on the Malabar Front. Just think of what *they* have to go through!' And then you have the pictures of the heroes laid out in front of you to remind you of their hardships the same way that those fictional characters in Orwell's 1984 would feel when they set their eyes on Comrade Ogilvy in the newspaper, a battered and tough-looking soldier fighting for Oceania artificially created by the main character, Winston, to create that very feeling.

Do we need to be humiliated and humbled by the preaching of those who continually elevate and glorify the flavour of the month? I don't think so.

It doesn't stop there, either. Who should be paid more? Who should be paid less? How come civil servants aren't taking a pay cut; many thinking in their minds that all civil servants prance around in suits and drink endless glasses of cream sherry like Sir Humphrey Appleby in [Yes, Minister](#). I assure you, most do not. Furthermore, remuneration for those in similar roles in the private sector is usually considerably higher, at least in Australia. Endless posts like these keep appearing as of late, but funnily enough, not much in the way of homelessness,

a deepening problem all over the world and worsened by the current pandemic. I, personally, have an issue with homelessness and find it distressing that anyone need to live their lives in such a state.

Lastly, I was appalled by comments made by those who rallied for the cruise ships to leave Australian shores not caring as to what may come of them and their crew and passengers. Basically, to... just... go... and be someone else's problem. Now don't get me wrong. The [Ruby Princess](#) incident seemed to be me as very poorly-managed, but for those who could not care less for those on the ship should try to imagine what it would be like being one of those passengers or crew on the ship. The very notion of being held prisoner on the ship with every eye on the mainland shunning you as if you've had leprosy or the plague and not knowing if you'll come out alive must have been terrifying.

The message I am trying to convey here is that reacting in a judgmental way and forming hasty opinions from the action and decisions of others without first thinking beforehand or putting oneself into the shoes of those affected is often polarising and does not add any useful value. During any crisis, we should all, at least, try to stick together, while maintaining social-distancing of course!