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Inside the Bubble

Wednesday, March 11:

Johns Hopkins employees received an email from the school announcing that all non-essential employees would be shifting to a remote environment starting March 16. On March 13 at 4 p.m. I wandered to the recycling area to find a small box. While many employees grabbed their laptops and headed out like it was a normal day, I knew in my gut this would be the last time I would step foot in my office for quite some time. The box filled up quickly; important personnel files, my favorite pens, even a calculator made its way home. What did not make it into the box were the photos of student-athletes that line our office walls, NCAA memorabilia, special event souvenirs, and my four amazing colleagues. They were not going to join me as I entered the "bubble."

Monday, May 11:

Two months into the new normal. Each day begins with an important decision. Do I wear the white polo shirt with black basketball shorts, or the blue shirt with white shorts? The Zoom world had taken over and we all were beginning to master its effectiveness to communicate. At first it was fun, new, interesting, but then like anything it became too routine. I began to challenge myself to pick up the phone more. Alumni, parents, and friends still wanted to connect, but it was our job to make sure we met them halfway in an environment that was comfortable for them. So began the early morning coffee calls. Quick check-ins to start the day off right, but not take away from their busy schedules. On birthdays, however, I was not dialing numbers. I held up my cell phone on selfie mode, hit the record button, and began a new tradition of sending fun videos to make sure love was felt on their special day. In this new environment, adaptation is necessary day by day, not every month or even year. That's how you will stand out, and that's how you will connect on a deeper level with your constituents.

Wednesday, June 10:

I sat frozen in my computer chair, locked to my screen, tears rolling down my cheeks. A dozen brave student-athletes of color, brought

together our administrative team for a conversation on race, and their experience as student-athletes. When you serve a single institution for a long period of time, you believe you understand all of the inner workings, and most importantly the experience of your student-athletes. I came to the painful realization that I actually know very little, but I was very ready to listen and learn.

Tuesday, August, 18:

Fall sports have been cancelled, students are learning to accept their remote experience, and many of us as development professionals are about to encounter the most challenging time of our careers. How do you inspire without blood, sweat and tears being poured into practice and competition each day? How do you ensure the next great facility is worth the investment right now, with no answer as to when the doors will open? How do you get up each day and bring 110 percent when your one true love seems lost? The answer is simple; "we will be back."



Mike McCarney

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When offered to write this article, I was initially going to write about branding and fundraising. I was pretty excited to share some of the things we've done the last few years at William & Mary, but given the circumstances, that didn't seem right.

Let's face it, 2020 isn't exactly what we all thought it would be. During this time you've probably been on a webinar or two the last few months while we adjust to our new routine of working from home and have heard the phrases, "It's time to get creative," "Think outside the box," or "From uncertainty comes opportunity." These statements tend to inspire us the moment we hear them, but the real question we must ask ourselves is, what are the steps we're going to take to make a difference and seize the opportunity when the time comes?

You'll often hear college athletics departments referred to as the "front porch" of the university. As members of the ticket community, I've always envisioned us as the folks sitting on that metaphorical porch. We are usually the first people our fans see when they come to an event, purchase a ticket, or contact the department.

Recently ticketing directors, managers, associates and salespeople have heard the questions, "Is there going to be a football season?" "How will I get my tickets this year?" "How do you socially distance a stadium?" Pretty unique questions, right?

Ticket offices across the country have always had to deal with a certain level of uncertainty, whether from handling upset fans, dealing with mediocre team performance, pesky tax law changes, natural disasters and now a global pandemic. These past few months have been no exception. Many of us have been tasked with projects that will radically change the way we do business for this year and possibly indefinitely. Changes could include mask-wearing at all events, reductions to stadium capacities and a switch to entirely digital ticketing.

These types of radical changes, while necessary, will undoubtedly create confusion, anxiety and perhaps frustration among our fan bases. We must take this time to recognize that there is a high level of uncertainty and seize this opportunity to equip ourselves with the necessary information. By doing so, this will allow us to be once again the welcoming and calming informational guide sitting on that porch.

Though we are all in the same storm right now, we are certainly all in different boats. As demonstrated from our virtual Convention earlier this year, it's been amazing to see the efforts across all of the various departments to see how we are handling this moving forward into our unknown future.

I'm not sure what our new normal is going to look like, but I know that we will overcome this obstacle and find ways to collectively and individually move forward.