



SITE Chicago Spark and Speak "Be the Bodyguard of Your Own Wellbeing"

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On Thursday morning, Nov 5th, several members connected on Zoom for SITE Chicago Spark & Speak interactive discussion around the topic of "Be the Bodyguard of Your Own Wellbeing". The session was moderated by Alex Bakalis and generated excellent conversation and sharing.

Let's start with the end of the call as that truly made an impact on everyone. Alex requested everyone to share what they were grateful for and there was resounding agreement that no matter how crazy the last 8 months have been, every single person was grateful for something that has come out of this. People were appreciative of the fact that they re-discovered they have an identity outside of what was on their business card and that it has changed the way they think about how they contribute to the world. Once you can do that, it gives you even more reason to be grateful for all you have and what you can do. Everyone agreed that as disappointed as we were with job changes, lockdown and the new normal, there was a sincere appreciation for the pause from the tornado of a life we had created for ourselves of being overscheduled, too busy and frankly, unfocused. Having an opportunity to catch our breath, re-evaluate our lives and discover ways to look at the new norm as a gift rather than a curse has made a huge impact. Family and friends have always been important, but this time has given us a chance to focus on what's really important of having them in our lives and why.

People shared that they wanted to participate in this call because they wanted interact and engage with fellow members who could commiserate and come from an open and honest understanding of what's going on in our world. They wanted to hear stories of what's worked, how to manage all the incoming information and sharing emotions. For those Members based in Chicago, everyone is feeling the pains of daylight savings time and it getting dark before 5:00 pm and what that does to your motivation level – especially when you are already working from home. It's important to make the commitment to get the fresh air as it clears your head and changes your perspective, not to mention the health benefits.

As the discussion continued, individuals shared emotions of survivor's guilt if they were still working and those who weren't working shared that they felt some conversations were being held back because the person who still has a job didn't want to be seen as ungrateful or insensitive when talking to someone who wasn't.

An individual shared that she had received great advice to make sure that people don't affect her positive energy and shared the metaphor of building a fort of pillows around her to protect herself from negativity and provide some self-comfort. Someone else shared that they are most missing the personal connections and conversations so rather than wallow, they make it a point to still have those conversations by calling 1-5 industry friends Monday – Friday. Not only does it provide that personal connection but it keeps their mind active and aware of what's going in the industry and how to be relevant.

Another common thread was that those working said their job was so different from what is used to be and those not working agreed that they were definitely missing being able to use their creative, planning and problem-solving skills and needed to find outlet keep them active. Of course, as has been a worldwide trend of the pandemic, many are trying new things or rediscovering things that had lost rank on the priority list whether it be golfing, fitness, walking, creative cooking or deep cleaning. Everyone agreed that it is imperative that you set an intention to make it a part of your routine and maintain it as it gives you a sense of purpose and a schedule. Yes, you literally have to think about ways to stay motivated and keep busy but if you put that in a mindset of gratitude rather than the alternative, it's much easier to accept. Speaking of schedule, one individual shared that she continues to get ready everyday – weekends too – as if she was going into an office to not fall into unmotivating behaviors. Another shared that even though she is furloughed, she is giving herself permission to take PTO and actually put an Out of Office message on her personal email to truly escape for a few days. She realized that as the calendar year end approaches, had she been working, she would have had a lot of vacation sitting in her bank and that normally wouldn't be the in case. While her professional life is different now, she still needed to take that time away from the screen to re-energize and re-focus.

While there is always fear of the unknown, it's how you handle that fear that can make it palatable. One participant shared that she takes a step back to look at the situation and separate things from what's out of her control to what's in her control and then work on those factors. Another schedules 10 minutes of "worry time" so when those nagging thoughts come to mind, she waits to for her schedule time and then writes them down and looks for patterns or triggers and how she can find ways address it. She also suggested using the Aura app which provides 3-minute meditation sessions that help calm her down and refocus.

There was mention of EventWell, the U.K. based membership organization that was designed to support and serve the event industry community with the knowledge and tools they need to stay well. There are some great resources and info available to explore at www.Eventwell.org Others felt that finding opportunities to re-direct their skills into volunteering has been a great outlet for having a purpose and feeling like you can give back and provide help.

With this being a discussion hosted by SITE, we also wanted to touch on what being involved in the Association has meant to them during this time. And again, there was much agreement around the sense of community that the SITE family provides. SITE has provided connection, an avenue to interact and be informed on what's happening in the industry. Those on furlough or laid off felt that SITE gave them an opportunity to keep a toe in the water to stay engaged, keep the work-minded muscles active at a time when it would have been so easy to step away. Another individual shared that he has opportunities to participate in a lot of other industry programming and association offerings, but he doesn't do as much and keeps returning to SITE because of the genuine sense of community and how much he gets out of the offerings.

We are all anxious to get back to business but interestingly, the conversation made clear that the "new normal" will be different because of what came to light when we forced to evaluate how things had been.