

May 2020

IN My OPINION

By Jane Dvorak, APR, Fellow PRSA *Jane*



Patriotism – It's more than a mask

I wish I could go back in time and have a chat with Thomas Jefferson and some of the other great leaders who helped form this country and the doctrines we have come to love to quote so flippantly for selfish purposes. I'm convinced if I had that chance, the intent of our Constitution and Bill of Rights would not remotely resemble the battle cries of today's "patriots." I use that term loosely because I think they are more "self-activists." In it for themselves, not the greater good of all or this country.

Frankly, that makes me sad. Spoiler alert! The world does not revolve around you, your needs, at your demand. Shockingly, it doesn't for anyone else either. We are spoiled to do as we wish, when we wish in whatever way we wish thanks to the vision of those forefathers. We are like no other place in the world. I also think our forefathers are rolling in their graves at the gross distortions people are making when referring to our freedoms and rights.



When did we become so short sighted to bear a cross on a mask or to stay home? To let this be the battle we choose to lie down and demand action.

A simple mask, people. A simple inconvenience for, in reality, a relatively short while. A recent security guard was shot and killed over a mask. Think about that. Think long and hard. You may be dismayed, shocked, but have you bucked the system and not worn a mask? Gone out for social fun when you were supposed to stay home? You may not have directly shot someone, but the risk you posed was no less to the masses around you.

Oh believe me, I'm no less eager to be free to enjoy a meal at my favorite restaurant, entertain guests, pray in my church, and meander wherever I might choose in this world without thinking about whether the person next to me has been careless and will force me or one of my loved ones to face the greatest challenge of their life – to live. There are no hoaxes here, this is a devastating disease we're fighting. Clearly some shock therapy is needed with visits to ICUs to have the public understand the scope and ramifications. Pictures clearly aren't doing enough to understand the immense undertaking happening in hospitals every day.

That my friends is at the crux of all this whining. You whined about isolation and wanting things to open up. Now they are, slowly, and you whine because you must wear a mask, have your temperature taken or distance yourself. Yep, it is whining under the pretext of being a patriot. Fighting for some unalienable right you believe you're entitled to. Guess what, so is everyone else and it might not play out in the same form or fashion in their mind or world. We're all in this together. That's a keyword – together. **Read it again...t o g e t h e r.** Yes, you are not alone in this world, we have a responsibility to this planet, to the animals, to the oceans and seas and to our fellow man/woman/child who also want to get back to work, to school, to travel, to reopen their businesses and to thrive.

A patriot is proud of what their country does and stands for. America is often touted as the standard, the greatest country because of our knowledge, our culture, our diversity and yes, because of our freedoms. The behavior of some Americans is appalling and even embarrassing. Take a Google trip through a few 2-year-old tantrum videos and then look in the mirror. Have you lost sight of what this country is about? Patriotism is about taking responsibility to come together (there's that word again) to find a solution. Doesn't matter who you are, where you came from or hope to go.

This is being a decent human and recognizing we all deserve to be valued. There's a level of respect for all those differences, in fact, there should be a level of admiration for what that diversity brings to this country and our ability to rise above, find answers that work for the good of all, to be sought after for one's dreams. If you're a nationalist, well, Godspeed. Now is not the time to demonstrate your arrogance at the expense of others. If you're going to be a patriot, know what that means.

Put the dang mask on, be grateful that you can and help find the heart this country was built upon, with the same intention our forefathers had when they crafted those rights you so passionately espouse. Now is the time to know we can collectively make some sacrifices, encourage innovation, mobilize resources and become inspired by doing your part – not for you, for everyone.

Let's talk sacrifice. There are people who get up each day *for you*. Yes, YOU! Police, firefighters, security officers, doctors, nurses, researchers, grocery clerks, factory workers, delivery personnel and dozens of other essential workers doing their best to make sure you can get food, take care of your family and remain safe from this disease. Your unwillingness to wear a mask or stay home says you don't care about their aging mother at home, their children who need home schooled, or even them. You care about you and whether or not a mask is uncomfortable or the inconvenience of walking your neighborhood instead of cramming into the gym. Think about that. They take the greatest risk every day, for YOU. Time to button up, buttercup.

Imagine if we channeled all this anger into positive action. Let's funnel that passion into ways that ensure our children are all fed and have enriching educations, there is gender equality and ageism brings forth wisdom and insight not a red slip. Let's cheer the colorful mixture of our country and the talents that lie in each of us. Some grand, some novel, some completely ordinary. You can have an impact and be a champion for positive change whatever your background or resources. Bucking the system on a mask seems trivial compared to the many issues one can face daily. Make a difference in this world, however big or small your contribution might be. Do it with intention.

I'm no scientist, no doctor of anything – MD, DO, PhD – but I know that it certainly can't hurt to suck it up for a little while to ensure I have the chance to enjoy all those freedoms so many have afforded me. We can't thank our frontline workers, first responders and veterans enough – not enough flowers, messages, waves, smiles (sm-eyes if you have your mask on!). Add a little kindness and gratitude to your day. Take pause, think how fortunate you are to eat what you wish, read what you want, know the people you do.

Give people a break. This is hard on the best of us. Kindness, compassion, heart can go a long way. If a child can organize a neighborhood art walk to give neighbors a mental break, think how you might do the same for another, a coworker, family and friends. Life isn't fair, it just isn't, but that doesn't mean you have to scream, rant, attack, abuse because you're inconvenienced. This is the time to remain informed – with credible sources – and to trust. Trust that we can come out the other side with new perspectives, understanding and purpose.

I just hope when this does reach a level of safety we can all accept, you have the presence of mind to relish in the meal at that restaurant, you thank the grocery clerk for trudging through to the end, you really feel the warmth of your friend's hug and you create memories that leave a legacy worth handing down to generations to come.