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Army Lt. Col. Elizabeth Martin conducts her final flight as battalion commander of the 2nd Battalion, 25th Aviation Regiment, June 7, 2019, over the island of Oahu, Hawaii. Martin went on to become a student at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. (U.S. Army photo)

## Manage what you can control in crisis

By Army Col. Elizabeth A. Martin

"Can't," "don't," "contain" and "restrict" are negative words present everywhere in the news, the media and conversation.

The threat of the Covid-19 coronavirus will undoubtedly remain a challenge for everyone for months to come. Significant abrupt restrictions and closures are making many within our communities feel very controlled and unhappy.

With so much heightened fear, paranoia and global concern due to Covid-19, stress and anxiety continue to skyrocket. While the containment strategy the United States is executing is difficult, it is vital to follow directed medical and public health expert precautions, mandates and guidelines to "flatten the curve" and control the rampant spread of this highly contagious and deadly illness.

As we all do our part to help, fear is natural. However when left unharnessed, fear can lead to panic and destructive behavior. We are already seeing this in grocery stores and other shops – just try looking for toilet paper.

Recent extended school closures and activity cancellations are already tearing apart the stability that children are accustomed to, need and enjoy. Parents are grappling with new daytime extended child care requirements, unforecasted home school burdens and how to keep children productive.

Many of us feel like we can't control much in our lives right now due to the threat of this powerful virus, but what we absolutely can control is how we react and what we do.

Based on military experience as a battalion commander and 20-plus years of service in the Army dealing with intense uncertainty and high stress, I offer the following tips for how to turn this pandemic into a productive and positive experience while concurrently doing our part to maintain social distancing in support the nation's battle against Covid-19.

• **Make lemonade out of lemons.** Take the restrictions and challenges presented by Covid-19 to create incredible opportunities. Continue to lead within your family and among your friends and colleagues. Be an example for your children and others to follow.

**Turn uncertainty into certainty.** This pandemic is plaguing society with heavy uncertainty, yet there is still so much we can control. Redirect your energy away from uncertainty and focus on those aspects of life that are certain.

**Community.** What are you doing to help your community? What talents or resources can you share for the betterment of others within your area? Do your elderly neighbors need assistance in a manner that you can support them within local restriction guidelines? If you are allowed to shop in your local community, remember that many small businesses are struggling during this crisis so wisely consider where you spend your hard-earned money.

**Immunity.** Improve your immune system through diet and exercise. Eat well and enjoy Vitamin C – this starts at home. If you do get sick, you will conquer it faster and more successfully if your immunity is strong.

**Time.** We traditionally never have enough time in our lives. If you are a parent of a school-aged child, you likely have far less time now if schools are closed. If you are not a parent of a school-aged child, you may have a lot more availability with so many activities and events cancelled. So, what are you going to do with this opportunity? Be decisive with time and make a productive plan.

**Get outside.** Go camping with family, go for a walk/run/bike, and get outdoors. Enjoy spring.

**Taxes.** We have no excuse for not having time to get taxes done now. Knock them out.

**"To do" list.** Closets and "to do" projects: now is the time. Tackle them.

**Leverage technology.** Use Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, phone calls and letters to stay connected. We already have the tools and the means. Don't fret on how to pursue education or communicate: Keep living and learning. Caution: Don't stare at your devices all day.

**Unplug.** Communicate with family and friends. This is an invaluable time to do so.

**Opportunity.** Focus on how to turn your Covid-19 prevention from a crisis into an unanticipated opportunity for growth, support, health, community and family.

**Discounts and offerings.** Many local and national companies are offering exceptional deals and special accommodations to maintain their customer base. Check them out.

**Invest.** What financial investments can you make now to help later? Stocks are at record lows; consider buying.

**Don't hoard.** So, where is all of the toilet paper for purchase across many stores nationwide, and why do people think they need it for Covid-19? This is a prime example of panic-induced purchases, and we shouldn't selfishly hoard products that create a lack of availability for others.

**Don't mentally suffocate; stay positive.** Control your reactions to restrictive measures required to prevent and battle this pandemic. Positive, productive mental health is a huge component needed to fight this illness and will directly improve community response.

**Create.** Challenge yourself and your family to be more creative with resources and time. Expand your boundaries within your home. Paint a room, use a new recipe and rediscover your ingenuity.

**Focus.** Turn your focus from what you can't do to what you can do.

**Win.** We cannot fall victim to feeling sorry for ourselves or become hindered during this difficult time. Don't let this virus win – mentally or physically.

We will come together as a nation if we all do our part to prevent and fight the spread of Covid-19. Turning the challenges of this pandemic into opportunities to positively exploit growth individually, within our families, and to protect our communities will bind us together. As we tackle this new, temporary normal, we can be more productive, stronger and happier if we focus on what we can do versus what we cannot.

*Army Col. Elizabeth A. Martin is a student at U.S. Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.*

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