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Resilience And Grit During COVID-19 | Lt. Gen. Larry D. James & Dr. Carol Geffner

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The Veritas Forum

The Veritas Forum at USC presents Lt. Gen. Larry James of NASA's JPL and Carol Geffner of USC. Learn from these two lifelong practitioners and proven leaders of different world views as they discuss topics of grit and resilience during COVID-19. • Please like, share, subscribe to, and review this podcast. Thank you!

Transcript

Welcome to the Veritas Forum. This is the Veritas Forum Podcast. A place where ideas and beliefs converge.

What I'm really going to be watching is which one has the resources in their worldview to be tolerant, respectful, and humble toward the people they disagree with. How do we know whether the lives that we're living are meaningful? If energy, light, gravity, and consciousness are a mystery, don't be surprised if you're going to get an element of this involved. Today we hear from Lieutenant General Larry D. James, the Deputy Director of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and Carol Geffner, the University of Southern California's Price School Professor of the Practice of Governance and Management.

In a discussion about grit and resilience during COVID-19, recorded from the University of Southern California. Professor Carol Geffner is Professor of Practice and Government Management and the Policy Process and Director of the Executive Master of Leadership at USC's Price School of Public Policy. For undergrad students who might not be familiar with an Executive Master, she teaches students primarily executives in the private public and non-profit sectors.

She leads them for a program designed to develop software leaders who have the capabilities to lead complex organizations. She also does research and focuses on the intersection of psychology, business, and leadership. She's an executive coach domestically and globally and has helped a consultant guide organizations and executives through drastic change in multiple industries and very diverse industries,

Taco Bell, Deutsche Bank, hospital systems, newspapers, so really a wealth of experience.

She also founded and still consults for a National Health Care Consulting firm, which helped to continue to improve healthcare in the face of major political economic and financial challenges. And before founding the healthcare firm, she was the Chief Learning Officer and President of Shared Services for basically like a \$2 billion integrated newspaper and media company where she provided executive leadership. She got her doctorate from Claremont Graduate University specializing in Adult Learning and Cognitive Development, Management and Organization and Women in Leadership.

She got her MPA from the University of Southern California right on and a VA from the University of Toronto. She's a person of Jewish faith. So thank you for coming on, Carol.

It's really a pleasure to have you. It's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

It's really a delight. Yeah. Next, we have a formerly attended General Larry James.

He's the Deputy Director at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory where he oversees thousands of scientists and engineers. His leadership at JPL has included missions to Mars and interstellar space. Prior to JPL, Lieutenant General James was the Air Force Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance at the Pentagon.

He's responsible to the Secretary and Chief of Staff of the Air Force for Policy Formulation, Planning and Evaluation, Oversight and Leadership of Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance capabilities and led more than 20,000 intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance officers and listed ranks in civilians. His 35-year military career included positions as a Space Federal payload specialist, GPS program manager, Titan 4 Launch Director. Those are rockets.

Commander of the 50th Space Wing at Shrediver Air Force Base. He was also the Commander of the 14th Air Force at Vandenberg Air Force Base and was Director of the Signal's Intelligence Systems, Acquisition and Operations Directorate in Washington, D.C. He's also the Director of Space Forces for Operation Iraqi Freedom at the Combined Air Operations Center in Saudi Arabia, got his bachelors from Air Force Academy and masters from MIT. He's the person of Christian faith and a fan of the Martian starring Matt Damon.

Really a pleasure to have you on as well. And as you can tell, we have some very distinguished guests. So we are collectively as an audience and as a moderator, very thankful for you both for coming.

So thank you. Thank you, Quincy. I was also a present surprise for me to find in my research about our speakers that both of them at one time, they were still continually have held board positions for the United Way, which serves the homeless communities.

So also very wonderful thing. So yeah, with that, we'll have to get straight into it and just begin asking what a workday has looked like for you in the past couple of weeks. And if there's anything that's been particularly challenging about working since COVID has really taken a hold on our country.

Hey Quincy, well, I'll start off. I think you were going to head this way. But you know, certainly it hasn't been the past couple of weeks.

It's been the last seven weeks for us that we've been working from home since that started with Stay Safe at Home. And certainly it creates a whole new rhythm in your life. I think that's kind of one of the challenges that you have to deal with that, even though my schedule is still similar in terms of meetings and events that are covered online now, number one, you're not commuting, number two, you're setting in your office or in the kitchen.

And my wife is also at home. So there's things going on around. And I've heard a lot of people talk about Zoom fatigue, where you're often just going from one online meeting to another.

And frankly, it takes a lot more concentration to really focus on a meeting online versus, you know, setting around a table and talking and discussing where the interplay goes back and forth. So I think those are some of the challenges. But you know, you figure out how to make it work.

So let me jump in on that. I think Larry and I both probably have very similar days. I actually, this question prompted me to write down what a typical day looks like.

So probably like everybody listening starts off with Zoom. When I can't sit anymore or when I set a timer, I'll get up and play ball with my dog. Then it's back to Zoom.

Then I might get on the ground and do like 15 or 20 push-ups or sit-ups. And it's back to Zoom, etc. I won't take you all the way through till the evening.

Ultimately, what I also do is try to wind down the day with a neighbor, with a very long walk. I fit in weights during the day in between Zoom calls. And the, you know, Larry mentioned about Zoom fatigue.

There's actually studies that are being now published about how Zoom taxes are brain differently. So it's a real thing. Also the lack of boundaries.

I'm not experiencing that in a severe way, but many people, particularly when the spouse is home and children are home, there's a lack of boundaries. So I do my best to create some, you know, with playing with my dog and exercise. Awesome.

I think just to jump on that too, Quincy, to her point, you have to figure out how to ease

your mind during this day. You know, for me, personally, I start out the morning exercising. So I feel like I've done that, but then you got to get out.

I'll take my laptop out on the porch when it's nice and just do my work from there occasionally. The end of the day, just like Carol, you know, we'll take a walk in the neighborhood. So you kind of have to just make sure there's time, as I call it, time for play in the middle of your day, otherwise you just get consumed by the stuff.

Yeah. I guess following from that, I've been talking to a lot of students. And I suppose to get into a little bit how this might have affected some students and their day-to-day, you know, job is oftentimes studying and that sort of thing.

But a lot of their plan also is to build up a resume or build up towards some sort of a career dream. But a lot of that seems to have stalled. Others are working, but have had to make really drastic changes to the way that they do things.

So with a lot of sort of tangible challenges that we can see, it's kind of become, I think, apparent to a lot of people that they're feeling a little bit mentally off. Like they're almost maybe like feeling a little bit like mentally adrift or something is just a little bit weird. Some people have almost felt lethargic and that sort of thing.

So is there anything that you think are the most immediate challenges to people's mental approach to work when they encounter uncertainty, like to this degree? Yes. So let me jump on that one and talk about how our brain functions a little bit. First of all, if we were in person, I would ask everybody to raise their hand if you're feeling if you tend to feel anxious, frustrated, angry, depressed, or, and I would continue that list and I bet every hand in the room would go up.

Let's just take a look at a few basic facts. Our brains don't know the difference between physical pain and emotional pain. So if you're feeling the anxiety around the uncertainty, for instance, your brain doesn't understand that that's anxiety.

It's going to react. It's going to light up the same way as if you were being hurt. Your brain, the pictures you have in your brain, what you imagine is real.

So the brain doesn't know any difference. If your picture yourself lying on a beach, you're relaxing, or if you're picturing yourself freaking out because you just lost your job and you're sitting and wondering, "Now what am I going to do with my life?" And you have all these pictures going through your head. The brain doesn't know the difference.

And lastly, just for this, your brain actually feels the same emotions as someone else you care about. So let's say you're in a house with a spouse or a partner, and that person is also going through uncertainties and stress. Your brain can't decipher whether it's you or that person.

So all of this is to say, when we as humans go through drastic uncertainty or uncertainties that feels significant to you or anxiety or stress, there's a real process that's happening physiologically. So it's important to recognize that this is normal. Now the follow-on question, and I don't know if Quincy wants me to jump there yet, is, "So what do you do about it?" So let me hold that.

But the main message is that in times of uncertainty, your brain, what happens here is it feels, everything feels unfamiliar. And our brains don't like unfamiliar. They like familiar.

So when Quincy mentioned that sometimes we feel off, it's because it's a different sensation going through your day than what you're neurologically, what you're used to. Let me just stop there and see what Larry has to say about this question. Yeah, because this has certainly been a challenge.

We've got essentially 6,000 people working off lab now, teleworking in a whole new environment. And so how do you give them the tools to cope? And I think to Carol's point, first is just recognizing, and I saw a great article in Harvard Business Review that I sent out for our management, says you've got emotional stress, economic stress, and something they call inertia, where it's like, "I feel like I'm just sitting here and I can't make progress." And you have to combat against that. And you have to recognize that certainly in your employees or in the students that you have to actively say, "Okay, economic stress, emotional stress, inertia.

How do I take actions to Carol's point of dealing with that?" And personally, for me, that's very real because my daughter, who's 33 and a software coder in New York City, was laid off by the startup that she works for. So now she's in the middle of all the COVID stuff. She can't go out of her apartment hardly.

She doesn't have a job. And now she's anxious and she's trying to find work. And so it becomes real when someone close to you has to deal with that.

Yeah, absolutely. I suppose maybe to ask to follow up with Carol a little bit on that, you mentioned that when you're facing uncertainty, but uncertainty of this degree seems, at least to a lot of people, like it's different. Do you, I guess both of you might be able to speak to this, do you think that's true? Do you think this uncertainty is representative of other uncertainties in life? Or do you think that COVID sort of represents something that might be totally different for people to deal with? Because it seems like everything is kind of crashing down for people who maybe have planned out all of these things.

Sure. So, all right, I'll jump in. This is a zoom phenomena.

We can't look at each other and read our signals. So I'll jump in and take a shot at that. First of all, for many of you listening, particularly those of you who are centenials or Gen Z, which many of you are, or millennials, you have not been in a situation likely that feels

like prolonged uncertainty.

We've all been through times that are short. We don't know what's next. You know, you're going from high school to college and so on.

But none of you likely have gone through something that's months and months and you don't see an end in sight. So in that regard, it is new. I feel the same way.

We don't know where this is going. That's the novel, excuse me for making a pun, the novel to mention of this. What that means that we have to pay even more attention to how we create boundaries, some structure, some goals in the short run, smaller, tighter, and not spend as much time looking at the long run.

Like, where am I going to be five years from now? Because you can't necessarily pull all those levers right now. So I'll stop with the suggestions. I know you're not ready for that yet.

Larry. Definitely along the same lines. I think structure is important.

You know, just the daily structure and the weekly structure because you know, you can get in the mode where, okay, I get up and I can't believe my pajamas on and I hang out and I watch movies and and suddenly you have an instruction in your life and we've all understood that structure is very important. And so having the structure, having those short time goals and then doing something you feel is important. Again, that's something we emphasize with our focus is that the work you're doing continues to be important.

You may be in a different environment. You may be doing in a whole different way of working. But even for students and those whose classes are kind of weird right now and you know, the future may be a little weird.

I think I want to focus on something that's important that I can do in this period of time and give myself some structure that will allow me to feel like that was good. I did something today or this week that I met my goal today. Awesome.

All right, so I'd love to move a little bit into the buzzwords for our discourse tonight, which are grid and resilience. So the question I guess is could you briefly maybe or maybe not briefly explain what these terms have meant for you in your experience as leaders and Carals as a coach of leaders and a professor of leaders and Larry also as a leader of many leaders and also engineers and scientists. Maybe let's go to Larry first this time.

Sure. You know, you know, you read a lot of definitions of what that really means. I think there's a couple of great words.

One is perseverance. You know, one is overcoming. One is continuing on.

I think all those kind of define risk because you will always find situations in life which you're not necessarily prepared for. And you sent us a link to a great study at West Point Cadets and having been a cadet at the Air Force Academy. I mean, part of it was just saying, I'm going to make it through this.

You know, you may not be the strongest person. You may not be the smartest person. And those that didn't have that grip, if you will, often stopped and said, I'm not doing this.

So part of it is just saying, I am going to make it through whatever is ahead of me. And as you do those things and you look back, you recognize that I could make it through that. And that encourages you to make it through the next thing.

So I'll stop there and then Carol and maybe have to go on. Well, I 100% agree with Larry. And I'll just add a few additional pieces of information.

I grit is, yes, formally defined as perseverance. So Larry set it very clearly. And its perseverance also focused on the long term.

So look, when you're young, this is an unfair part of life. When you're young, you cannot see the long runway ahead of you. When you're 20, you can't imagine what life is going to be when you're 40 or 50.

And one of the problems that young people face is you want so hard to create a career, right? And then something like this happens and it feels like the train is stuck on the tracks. Perseverance comes into play when you keep imagining you are going to have a career. You are going to have a profession.

And guess what? This is only one time of many in which your profession is going to go in a completely different direction than you anticipated. One of the things that I'm doing research on right now are prominent women leaders who are in male dominated professions and organizations. And in addition to all of the other leaders I work with, one by one, these women who are now mostly between 50 and their 60s have unfolded their stories and every single one has said I am not here where I thought I was going to be when I was in college except for one rocket scientist.

I that she was the exception. So that's, and I will share that when I graduated college University of Toronto I came to San Diego and we were in a recession. I was out of work for eight months.

I ended up going on unemployment insurance so I wasn't much different and I had no idea how I was going to pay my bills. And then I became a waitress. So the issues here are one reminding yourself you've got the goods.

You wouldn't be listening to this if you didn't. You are ahead of the game. You're in

college or you've graduated college or grad school.

So and you've got all kinds of capabilities. So you might not have, I know centenials don't like to hear this, you might not be able to get your dream internship or your dream job in the next six months but you've got a long runway. Now resilience is different.

Resilience is about adaptability. It's taking the good with the bad and it's adapting to changing circumstances. So while they're different you're actually practicing them both now.

Even though I can't see you, I know that because you're on zoom right now so you've already adapted. So I'll stop there. Thank you.

And Larry I want to go back to something you said really quickly. For anybody who is sort of inexperienced in grit, it might be useful to explore like how does somebody begin or take that first step? What are the things that are important? Because from somebody who hasn't done it before might sound like okay well you're the deputy director of JPL. You've done all this stuff.

You landed stuff on Mars but I don't have any experience yet. So could you speak a little bit to how you begin to start doing that? How did maybe how you personally began to have grit? Something like that. Yeah I think it does come back to somewhat what we talk about is just having those short-term goals that say I will get through this.

Going back to my undergrad days of the first thing we had to do at the Air Force Academy was the basic training. And every day was something challenging, something new, something different and you didn't know what was going to be thrown at you. So you kind of just learned to say okay I will get through this day.

And then you were successful that day and you say okay I did that. Now I will set my goal for the next day. So I think it really is starting with small steps to say okay I'm going to get through this task or I'm going to get through this class or I'm going to get through whatever it is.

And over time you realize that number one I can do it so that kind of defines the perseverance of the grip. But I think the Carroll's point it starts to show you that I do have some resilience. They threw this at me, whatever happened and I was able to handle it.

And that just builds upon itself and gives you the self-confidence I think to really respond and have the resilience to handle the things that life throws actually. I'm going to let me piggyback on Larry's comments. Larry you said something that's really essential.

You said you do something you do a task and then you say yeah I can do that. That's the piece that I hope everybody can hear who's listening tonight. Because what we often do

is we do a little task and then we say oh that was nothing or well that's not my dream job or well I didn't do or I got rejected from this.

The important part is that with every step that you take a moment or you have someone tell you someone you trust tell you you know what you just did that and kudos. So you got to celebrate the small wins and that's a lifetime lesson because gosh only knows when you're I'll say as old as I am you fall down a lot and you get rejected from all kinds of things in life. And it's really important to build a muscle now you're building it.

Some of you already have an advanced degree in grit or resilience if you've come from homes where there was trauma or in your formative years somewhere there was trauma. Research does show that young people who go through trauma tend to develop resilience and and/or grit earlier on in life. So some of you already have the muscle now's the time to use it.

Now the other another way of this is going to sound very commonsensical but you got to put one foot in front of another. That that sounds silly but the way you develop grit is you move you take action. The thing that gets in the way is our heads.

You know if you could take a small action every day and check it off and your head wasn't your enemy you would feel better about yourself. So I don't want to go into a I could get on a soapbox right now but what we do in our heads that actually hold us back they're the biggest barriers. So yeah it's the small things it's the small steps it's the celebration it's the acknowledgement and building support around you with people who say look what you're doing.

Carol if you want to briefly go into how we do that to ourselves I think that could actually be really useful for some of our students who are feeling sort of lethargic or like they're stuck just because I think sort of like when you go to the doctor right you you leg hurts but having an x-rays in some sense comforting because you know what you're up against. I think that I think if you would be willing to go quickly into that and and sure and any one of your listeners who has been through a chronic illness understands what you just said because oftentimes with chronic illnesses we don't know where it's going we just have to learn to live with it and that's kind of what we're facing right now we need to learn to live with it. So this thing on our shoulders it can be really helpful the problem is we have we tend to have a negative bias so what that really means is something happens in your life like your internship gets canceled and the the monologue that's running oftentimes is negative I'm never going to get another one that was my best one that's what I wanted etc etc and and it's like a runaway train and that's what our brains do our brains are made to think and all of you listening are in college or you've graduated college so you're really good thinkers and what needs to happen is that same brain needs to interrupt itself by one going over and over some other affirmations like as Larry said I can do this like it's only one day like today I'm having a

bad day well tomorrow is going to be a better day so we can actually use realistic honest affirmations we also can use our bodies so when you are when your brain is running away with you with negative thoughts that is causing stress in your body problem is you can't feel it but it's happening so the another way to intervene is by using your your physical cell to release the stress so when you're having a problem with your head go out and take a walk go take a run walk around your your backyard five times move it will interrupt that runaway train I can also I could also talk about emotionally what we should do to be brief let me just say that there's a ton of research on gratitude so when you have runaway negative thoughts one of the things I would suggest to you is that you either start keeping a daily gratitude journal or you start mouthing out loud by the way when I walk my dog in the morning it's a mindfulness walk and what I really do when there's nobody around I will say things to my dog because of course he understands English look at that beautiful tree oh my gosh look at that bird oh I love this flower because there's been all this rain if you listen to Veron Sonys Veritas Forum that was that preceded us a few months ago if you listen to him he said a lot of grateful comments I'm grateful for being here I'm grateful for you gratitude actually has a correlate with our brains so I would I would urge you to start practicing gratitude every day all day with the little things like I'm grateful for being here I'm grateful for meeting you etc it's that specific thanks okay Larry I want to go to you with this next question to begin and in one of our previous discussions you said something I thought was particularly awesome you said one of your mantras is to thrive in chaos that sounded like so cool so for students I guess maybe not even for students but in your experience as a leader of scientists and engineers and in uncertainty I guess Carol this is really appropriate for you as well as being somebody who's consulted in in the face of big change affordable care act with the health care and and other things like that how have you motivated your or what strategies have you undertaken to encourage the adoption of characteristics of grit and resilience in your supposed subordinates or in your workers or in your ranks well again part of it is just teaching again like I said you know this kind of goes off into a little bit of a path but you know I think we all have to be lifelong learners and you know I'm constantly trying to read different you know articles and books and then apply that or send that down to the various management levels and so as I said I've sent multiple articles down to the managers it says here's how you deal with working at home here's how you deal with emotional stress and so I think at this level it's it's about teaching and then modeling people look to leaders frankly as a model and you don't really know you could even just be a leader in class but people look to you to set the tone and to set the tenor of a group an organization or whatever so part of it is teaching and constantly learning and then filtering that down to those that are under you know that work for you and with you but the other component is modeling and I think that's so important because you've probably I'm sure Quincy you never had a bad instructor right so but but my point is you can think about that was a great instructor that was a great professor oh that was not such a great professor and I don't want to be like that person so modeling and teaching I think is extremely important and modeling is

just keep your head on straight the calm don't fly off the handle on these types of environments be thoughtful of others take others into consideration when you're making decisions all those things permeate as a leader so those are teaching and modeling I think are TT components of how you get this down into the organization first of all yes and yes thank you Larry modeling modeling modeling and look for those of you who are listening some of you will go into large organizations and you will at some point in time move through various jobs and ultimately manage and and then maybe go into executive roles others if you want to start a business being a new or it doesn't matter your path if you want people to follow you you have to be a leader otherwise you turn around and there's nobody there so which happens a lot because you've all probably worked for both good and bad leaders so if you as a leader in addition to role modeling and boy is that ever critical a little rabbit trail here one of my best bosses took me aside one day I was an executive and so a lot of people you know would watch what I do and say and I he called me back in his office and he said Carol when you leave my office I want you to make sure you take a breath before you leave my office and you walk out with a calm demeanor because people will read your face and if you have even the slightest look of anxiety they're going to interpret that to me and the business is going down so just that just a personal story um in addition to what Larry said said I would do this um you have to start up by recognizing your employees are all different so some of them have strengths some of them are better off when they're in structured and highly highly structured environments they're going to wrestle at a time like this because there's so much change and uncertainty other and and you and other people love the flexibility and they have a harder time when everything is regimented so as a leader it's really important to call out a person's strengths and in chaos the best of you and the worst of you is going to show up so it's really important not to just go for well you're not doing this and you're not flexible but you got to go the other direction and see what you can do to help the person and support them through change change is rough for everybody just a matter of degree so here's another tactic ask questions if you have someone working for you I hope you're asking regularly what can I do to help you how are you feeling what's going on with you because now that we're in zoom we all know that people have these lives behind us and a lot of them are stressful right with little kids sick parents etc and and if something is really important and you want to help someone because they're they're blowing out they're really not responding in a productive way or acting in a productive way give them feedback close to an event so if you have an employee who's just walking around angry or dower you know don't let it go on for weeks pull the person aside privately and say you know let me let me just share something I'm seeing I don't know what's going on but let's talk about it so there are some little steps that you can take so for students who don't yet find themselves in you know those leadership positions should they be searching for people who are doing this like how should students engage with people that would provide that sort of a model that could be an encouragement during sort of adversity or uncertainty like we're experiencing now so I'll take this one first and then to turn it to Larry it's really really

important at a time when there's a lot of feelings that can be negative right it's really important to build people in your life who have optimism who are who who are likable whom you trust you don't have to be a formal authority figure it is critical at a time like this because there's this there's this thing called social contagion and what that means is if I'm with you and we're hanging out and I'm and much of the time I'm just going way way way I can't stand this and I'm well and I'm just complaining much of the time it makes it much harder for you to remain calm to see the positive to to enjoy your day so it's what you can do as a student as a young person is reach out to your friends who are helpful and supportive your family your your neighbor I have a neighbor I walk with and I love her to pieces but she tends to be kind of dark and so what I do because we're spending a lot of time together is I make sure I have a happy hour with a couple of other friends during the week I'm doing some phone calls that I don't usually do because you need to bolster your spirit and to be honest I would just literally echo that I mean find your folks in your life they don't have to be a leader they don't have to be a professor but find the folks in your life who have that attitude and personally you know as I look at folks that that are we're bringing up to be leaders and managers that's one of the characteristics we look for is what is your view in terms of optimism or pessimism because those who have a positive view and those who inculcate that into the folks that work around them and with them and for them they're dramatically more powerful in terms of operating the organization so you want to build that worldview in your head frankly right now you know that I'm going to be optimistic about this and I realize that you know we all have a natural disposition and you know some of us are more optimistic than others my wife is always saying you can always find a patch of police time and so that's just my natural tendency but but cultivate that in yourself and find people who you can hang out with whether it's on Zoom or whether you're walking the friends in the neighborhood or whatever or family that help you maintain that attitude very important thanks so I want to move us a little bit towards worldviews there's a beloved professor of philosophy at USC Dallas Willard who said you cannot opt out of having a worldview you can only try to have one that most the chords with reality including the whole realm of facts concerning what is genuinely good so with that in mind where do you see your worldviews playing into your views of grit and resilience or your experience as a leader in uncertainty I guess Larry let's go with you on this one sure well Dallas Willard is a great person so glad you quoted him yeah I mean so as you said Quincy at the start you know I am a Christian I'm coming from the Christian background and that really gives you a particular worldview and certainly I think in any time of life and certainly in times of change or in times of stress that we're in I think that gives you an anchor to hold onto you know kind of one of my life versus from the bible paul road a letter to the Romans and where she said you know we know that all things work together for good for those who know him they're called according to his purposes and so that gives you an anchor to hold onto yeah things aren't always going to be perfect and there's always going to be challenges and bad things that happen but ultimately especially when you're old as I am and you look back you can see that wow I didn't get that job that I really wanted or that

position but this worked out incredibly well and so you have to number one have an anchor to hold onto and I like Carol's comment you know I try to start every day with prayer and meditation and that just centers you and part of that is just thankfulness you know recognizing that as Carol said you know for the students hey you're at a great university you've got a great future ahead of you yes you can't see the next two or three months but be thankful for the things that you do have and when you start your day for me and prayer meditation with that anchor of knowing that things are going to work together for good that centers you in a way that I think allows you to go through the tumult and the chaos and all those things.

I think this question is wonderful actually it tasked me I've spent a lot of time over the past week thinking about this and wrestling with with ways of framing the answer so I have come to two simple frames one is yes I am Jewish and so my familiarity is fundamentally with the Judeo-Christian set of beliefs I'm also spiritual and that's developed over many many years so you have the sense that first of all all life is precious all life not just human life and that we're all connected so you know I was raised in a family where giving back and charity was really really important and so I saw that it's a lot of other things that weren't so good but I saw that and that's also part of a Judeo-Christian belief system and so how that plays out at a time like this is I think every day about who can I help and how am I helping anybody and is there something I can do to help more and even if it's little you know like calling a friend and saying are you okay that giving back is part of a world view for me because it it reminds me always that we are connected with one another and that's fundamental I also took a piece of a quote from Rabbi Ellie Spitz who's a rabbi here in Tuston just an amazing thinker and writer and this is only a tiny portion of what he said but I love this he said our lives are fleeting our knowledge is limited and yet we have the power to improve the world and that speaks to my worldview because I didn't realize this in my 20s 30s or even 40s you know I always ask why am I doing this work and it doesn't matter when I came to years later was I do the work I do whatever it is whether I'm in a newspaper company or USC I do it to try to improve the quality of life even if it's for a person so that's that's very tied to my belief system and I would say to you all of you young people worry not about whether you have an established worldview because it changes right and and who you are 19 and how you think will evolve very very much you know by the time you're 20 30 40 50 so there you go so Larry I want to follow up with your comment on that just in that people might hear that and think about how this measure of faith in that things are going to work out is one thing but then going out and doing all this work and working your butt off to make something happen is another so could you talk a little bit about how those things sort of fit together for you personally as somebody who works with a ton of very highly motivated people and a high achieving organization but then still have this the like believe that faith is an integral part of of how it all works out yeah I think just because you have faith doesn't mean you don't put your heart and soul into what you're doing you know you know another great verse is whatever you do work with all your

heart not just for your human masters and so I think we all are called to give our very best faith doesn't mean well I can just sit back and put things in a happen to you know we're called to do our very best and show our very best but but the faith comes in to recognize that I think I don't always control my future in fact I don't really control my future in many ways but in my faith there's someone who does and I can rest in that and recognize that I will do my best I will seek to be the best person I can and the best witness of that faith as I can and then we will move forward and accept what happens you know doesn't mean you don't try to change things but you understand that you may do your very best here and suddenly you get a curve ball that's just life and then that faith gives you the strength to go okay we'll go to this next thing I hope that helps illuminate that a little bit yeah yeah um I'd love to move a little bit towards sort of another maybe something that listeners are thinking about now is it sounds like we're tasked by the experts with going out and doing so where and you talked a little bit about it both in your personal rituals a little bit about rest or getting yourself prepared sort of for the day so having grit having resilience is sort of like sounds like it's getting up and doing something but then rest is sort of taking a pause so how are students supposed to balance those right now where it seems as if they have an opportunity for rest but then at the same time they still have the score to do or maybe they see them they feel pressure to build something or make something right now so where is is there sort of like a sweet spot there uh Carol let's start with you so I would say that there's there's not a recipe right so I would not suggest that there's a sweet spot for everybody but this is a critical topic so first of all think about it this way if you're trying to build resilience in your life that means you can adapt you can flex you can move the more stressed you are the less flexible you are so when you talk about rest and I would add to that anything like meditation um walking just breathing which is all these are all aspects of rest this is essential for your well-being and your well-being is a long-term game so yes you know everybody listening tonight I'm going to make a big assumption that you are going to good schools or you've gone to good schools so you all are achievers whether you're achieving at the level you want or not as a different conversation you might not be as good at taking care of yourselves mentally and emotionally and rest and you can go google all the science or on sleep but rest is a way for your body to regroup get energy and be more focused your brain gets tired uses a lot of energy so mostly I would say that you need to give yourself permission right so we can talk till as they say till the cows come home but mostly you need to give yourself permission that it's okay to take 30 minutes out because then you're going back and you're putting 30 minutes in or an hour in it's it's a zero-sum game if all you're doing is working to achieve an end result you're actually working against yourself and I would just maybe amplify that a little bit quincey I mean just a life story you know in the year four she did 30 days of vacation a year and there were many people who took pride in not taking all their vacation because they felt that that makes me look like I'm working really hard and I'm doing really good things the reality was I always made sure I took my 30 days of education every year because as Carol said it's just so important that you get that time away you get that time with

friends or family and just to rest and relax and put all this other stuff behind you and then you come back much more effective and then you can indeed continue to do everything hardly is into the Lord you know so so I think those are the things that you have to take into account and and you know there is life balance at JPL we tell all of our new employees I greet all of our new employees and I say one of the important things here at this lab is work life balance we want to make sure that you have time to spend with your friends your family your significant others and time to enjoy the things that are all around us here in Pasadena you're going to work hard when you're here but we want to make sure you have that time to rest recharge and come back even better so even as students you have to work on that you know study life balance work life balance and make sure you're paying attention to that Quincy can I add to Larry's comments for a moment remember that every day you have an opportunity to build up your bank account your emotional reserve so in addition you know right now none of us are planning the grand vacations we were hoping for that's for sure and we're at home a lot hopefully you're at home a lot everybody so you have the best opportunity right now actually better than if you are in a formal job somewhere to take five-minute breaks you are better off to work for an hour 45 minutes an hour and a half and take a five-minute stretch break or or lie down I do frequently I because I practice meditation frequently I'll do a six minute I'll go to an app that I have and I'll do a six or seven-minute meditation because I can feel myself getting tired being on zoom all the time and I can feel myself just wearing down so before I get there I will get on the floor actually with my dog and do a little a little rest break so I'm urging you to see the opportunity you have oftentimes once you get into that formal job setting you can't go shut the door or lie on the floor so you can go to your car and take a five-minute break but that's about it so so one more thing on that actually before I go to that I just want to invite our audience again to go to the Slido site and upvote the questions that you'd most like to be seen in the Q&A just that we get the best questions that the most people want to be answered but before we we're going to do one last question then we'll go to Q&A wondering from both of you what you think so there's this another professor Warren Benes at USC who's a great student of leadership and a prolific writer and sort of wrote the book on leadership I guess you could say he advised people like JFK Ronald Reagan and tons of executives in the corporate world public world whatever he said basically humble leaders do not debase themselves neither falsely nor do the low self-esteem they simply recognize all people as equal and value and know that their position does not make them a god so my question for both of you I suppose is how when students begin to exemplify these traits of grit and resilience and making that step how do they then how does humility fit into that because that seems like that could be a challenge in that some people might struggle with the pride of sort of becoming this resilient you know up from the ashes type of success story especially because we have a lot of students on the call who have big plans for the future and that sort of thing so yeah Larry we'll start with you sure you know I just like the term servant leadership you know I think you know it goes back to the comments I think both Carol and I made that you look at everyone you know as as

you know you're no better than they are in one sense we're all humans we're all trying to do our best and to try and set ourselves above another just frankly leads to problems and so I think it comes from that humility of recognizing that you know we're all starting from the same place and but you know you want to do your best but it comes back to being humble about who you are being humble about those around you that doesn't stop you from taking on a tough task taking on a tough assignment you know it doesn't stop you from doing any of those things but you do it in a way that people you're not putting people down you're not stepping on and trying to get ahead you're recognizing that we all have value and and you just want to have that heart that that just recognizes that I'm here to serve this organization the student community you know in order to make the world better at the end of the day I mean ultimately that's a great objective we can all have you know one of the things you know one of our kind of motto is that day Pella is dare mighty things we all want to dare mighty things but we can do it with the spirit of inclusiveness bringing people along but still doing our best and taking on the tough assignments and so on it's just how do you approach it versus you know you can still do well but you can still be humble it's kind of rambling answered but you know that's that's where you are it's not rambling at all it's spot on quoting a Jim Collins from Stanford a lot of you have heard of the book Good to Great when he did a study about organizations and leaders that were high performing in other words they really they really had the metrics so they were outperforming their peers and one of the primary traits that he discovered in that research was that those kinds of leaders had a set a deep deep sense of humility just as Larry is mentioning so you know it's a trap this is a very important topic I only wish we had lots of time for it there's a trap as we become more and more achievement oriented and more and more successful and we take on bigger and bigger titles there's a lot of research that's been done on narcissism and unfortunately many of your listeners have either worked for or will work for really narcissistic leaders who don't understand humility and don't practice humility the end of the day you got to ask yourself do you want people to work with you or don't you it's that simple you want people to respect you or don't you do you want people to follow you or don't you and humility is is a human trait that I believe we need to cultivate for our entire lives it is it is an attractor it is it speaks to your humanity and those who are not practices not there's no word like that I this is my PhD speaking those of us those who don't practice humility tend to drive people away as Larry knows from the military they will often get people to comply with their orders or their direction and then as soon as people can run away from them they do so I could I mean I think between Larry and myself we could spend another hour just talking about this question it's a it's a rich one and I would urge the listeners to take a look at Venice's work take a look at Jim Collins work in addition to the faith-based work that's been done on humility I go back to kind of starting every day with prayer and meditation and thankfulness you know you look at what for me personally what has gone on in my life you know first kid in his family to go to college came from a rural community in Appalachia you know all these things you look back and say wow you know I have to be thankful for that because in reality it wasn't anything I did in many

ways it was the abilities that were given to me and that I try to make these and so when you have that spirit of thankfulness and recognition that you know I didn't necessarily do all this on my own yeah I worked hard and I know these things but it kind of graces humility in you when you look back and just you have this spirit of thankfulness for the things that have been given to you and so that's one method that every day I try to use to recognize it you know humility is important and you know I wasn't God's gift to the world when I came into it so anyway I'll shut up now that's okay um I actually have one I have one final question before we go to Q&A and it's for both you and Lara will continue with you um as you are now what is the most stark difference in your views of grit and resilience as compared to your younger self can you think of something that has changed in your opinion of how to be resilient how to have grit if not that's okay but would love to to explore sort of what has changed in in your understanding of those two things as you've grown and experienced more and more responsibility I think it's more not necessarily understanding but the practice of I go back to what we said early on you know early on it's like okay let me get through this day let me get through this past I think as you go into higher levels of leadership it's you know your grit and resilience is more about longer term goals and objectives that you have to have the resilience and the grit to just stay on the path and get there it may take two years it may take a year and a half because now you're trying to make a difference in larger and larger organizations so I think it's more perspective versus understanding what grit and resilience are I think it's still the same traits but now the focus is different in terms of where you're trying to go and how you're trying to do it. Cheryl? Sure I would say the biggest difference between my earlier years you know teens 20s 30s is that I wasn't aware of grit and resilience first of all the literature wasn't robust and I just thought as Larry said you get up every day and you do your work and sometimes you're miserable sometimes you're happy you just do you just you know baby boomers this was part of the baby boomer era we didn't have a lot of choices you just did what you did now I'm not only very aware of the literature and it's so abundant I mean you can go on listen to YouTube videos it's just it's ubiquitous so not only that but more importantly I'm aware of myself I've spent really a lifetime developing deep deep deep self-awareness over many many many years so I'm aware of not only how important grit and resilience is because I study it because I work with leaders for the last 30 years so I've learned from them but I've learned that for myself if I want to live a long and fruitful life and a happy life I need to keep practicing those muscles those are those are part of it and practice other muscles too like optimism gratefulness etc but there it's not easy as they say getting old is not for the faint of heart and so I practice the muscle every day awesome okay so I'm going to move a little bit to the q&a now so the first question I'm seeing is that somebody wrote I have I feel that I have less time now and I'm being pulled in many different directions I have school and family situation and extra time any advice I know I need to focus so a couple of pieces of advice this first one you may not like but if you go on if you look up grit Angela Duckworth at Penn was the person who developed the of the term grit and she has a grit scale on her website AngelaDuckworth.com and you can

take the scale by the way and see how you're doing so that's the first answer the more important answer is this is an experience that many many people are having because there are no boundaries now the days roll into one another you know today it's like what's today is it this day or that day and the hours just are endless and people are pulling on you so here's the number one suggestion is you have to create boundaries they can be small it can be as much as saying to young children or parents I need to go into my room for the next 15 minutes and close the door or I need to go out take a walk for 10 minutes they can be very small but you need to have separations in the day a few times so that so that you can re-center you can breathe you can rest you can meditate you can do whatever you do to help you then go back and replenish and pay attention to someone and be present that's the simplest answer or response. Larry do you have anything to add on that one? I would just kind of echo that in one sense of you know I go back to the structure piece you know if you feel like okay I get up and you know I've got to deal you know whatever your situation in siblings or schoolwork or parents or online stuff but if you're just kind of randomly going through the day you're going to be wasted at the end of the day and so I think developing some structure building in those away times and be times developing some structure that says okay you know what I'm going to do this just for my enjoyment you know I like to read books so I'm going to spend an hour in my room just reading or outside on the porch or whatever so develop those structures develop those times where you're doing something for yourself that you enjoy in times of rest and I think you'll get through it you know life gets crazy sometime it's pretty unique now but we've all had you know when you've lived a few years you'll find there's a lot of crazy times you just have to bring that structure that rest and those things that you enjoy together to keep themselves sane.

So something I wanted to ask was also sorry one second sort of to follow up on that is that and so here's there's another question here that I really liked but first I wanted to go back to something that Carol mentioned to both Larry and I before the event which was a little bit about reactivity versus like adaptive qualities in leaders and that sort of thing I was wondering if you could I really enjoyed when you talked about that I thought it was really interesting because I think a lot of students right now are feeling pressure in part to be reactive they're seeing maybe their peers go out and build some sort of thing that's going to save the world from COVID and then that kid's going to stick on their resume and maybe they're feeling some sort of like external pressure so to the students who are feeling sort of that sort of a pressure what what would I guess both of you Larry you can hop on this as well what would you say to students who are seeing their peers sort of come around and come up with all this stuff that's all publicized and they're feeling that pressure to come up with some sort of cure all meanwhile they're also trying to balance all this extra time which they could now spend with family or investing into relationship and it sort of seems like it's like almost like a moral conundrum for some. So the first thing I'm going to say is that any suggestion or solution that I've put forward to today and I think I'm talking for Larry too which is dangerous because I can't talk for him

because I we're not even in the same room. There's no one recipe for anything this is uh it's like a kit bag it's like you're building a backpack or a kit bag of tools so what what I'm about to say has to be put in in context of that.

First of all you will always face people around you who are climbing mountains and you're walking over boulders you're working over stones in other words they will most of you are highly competitive to begin with and no matter where you are you're going to be working with people who are doing more doing better achieving faster are brighter than you and this is a humbling experience so that notion that inner competition that you have this is a really good time to start practicing with taming it not getting rid of it but putting it in perspective that yes some of your friends are going to build an app very few of them are going to make billions maybe one will and and some will meet some interesting people and that may not be your path right now but what are you going to be doing next year that they're not doing and that's life that's just that's not COVID you're just seeing it more acutely right now another I want to go back to something I actually said earlier when you start to see your friends doing what you think is amazing and you're feeling less than or should I be doing this or that I was talking to you before about your head this is a really good time to start becoming aware of okay what am I plugging in my head right now oh I'm plugging in my head that I should be doing a b and c I don't have the motivation that my buddy has and that's the follow on to that is all right let me put some perspective around this and what am I doing and what am I working on and what do I feel good about even if it's small because you're in a marathon you're not in a sprint and so some of this is just believing having faith that what you see right now over six weeks eight weeks two months three months that's not life that's just a period of time Larry any thoughts on that yeah um you know I get back to that last comment this is an interesting period of time but it is a period of time and so this is not going to make or break any of us in terms of what our future looks like five years from now or 10 years from now so so I think having that perspective even though it's kind of crazy right now and our body's kind of you know and frankly I'd say stay off social media in the news because I just amplify all this stuff but but you know recognize that this is not going to be a big deal in terms of my opinion your personal goals and life five or ten years from now okay somebody does a great thing over here and you did but when I go back to okay what do you want out of life is it truly just always climbing the corporate ladder and being successful and doing those things or is about relationships is about friends is about enjoying what I'm doing those are fundamental questions that as you kind of shape what your life is all about I think you have to have in the back of your mind is and and people bloom late I mean people that we hire that don't come out of the best Ivy League schools and they may not have had the best GPA and they become incredible scientists or engineers 10 years down the road and they're they're doing amazing things so please don't get hung up right now on this particular situation and then think what is it that I really want out of life what brings me joy and a big part of that is relationships and enjoying those around you so I'd like to piggyback on Larry's comments because what he

has just said is probably one of the most important messages of the whole evening so far and that is as human beings we're social animals and what we need more than anything are our good relationships in our lives that's what we're wired for we'd like to think we're so sophisticated but we're really a lot like the cave people way back when that's that's what will carry you through life and through good times and bad times and at the risk of sounding dour they're going to be plenty of bad times ahead of you and it'll be more good times so this is practice this is like a practice run and when you go and you're working in a job someday whether it's six months and a year or two years it doesn't matter let's say you're in consulting or you have joined JPL or some other company and let's say you're working a hundred hours a week you're going to be that person who says I have no time for relationships I can't I'm so stressed I'm so tired so right now it's understandable that at a young age there's a sense of impatience like I got to do this now understandable that's normal and this is great practice for you to start building your whole life not just one aspect of your life so I wanted to comment on that because Larry's point is so very critical yeah terrific we have another question from the Q&A which is maybe a little bit more practical but an anonymous viewer asked us how would you recommend making the best of extended period of time that is this summer with no work and the canceled internship you know be a lifelong learner you know I mean I think this is a great time to think about what do I want to learn you know an example here in my house my wife learned to play the piano when she was a kid she felt like she never did at it so she went online found this lady produced books for adults on how to play the piano and now she's learning again but be a learner take take this time to you know there's plenty of podcasts there's plenty of online things you can do so I think that's number one maybe you know just to feel like hey I'm doing something I've got structure I'm learning something and then secondly I think about back to the point that we just made the relationships are the relationships that I can strengthen these time that are important to me that I have not had time to to work at because of school and all the pressures that I've been under and so on so two things for me you know do some learning build relationships but Carol probably got some other yeah I'm gonna I'm gonna go with that I'm gonna run with that um personal story yesterday I got a text from a friend of mine who asked if I would be part of a spiritual circle she was putting together not religious a spiritual circle she had identified seven women she reached out to each one on text privately and said this I'm feeling a need to have a support group around me with good energy and and helping me with things that I'm tackling and by the end of the day she had seven yeses and my point to that is there's so much that we have an opportunity to do right now and to be that is going to go away before you know it so you have a summer and by the way I have a son who's a millennial so some of this I'm very very familiar with personally she has a summer and you don't have structure going back to it Larry said what are you curious about who can you help is there someone in your neighborhood who needs some food is if you're young and you're healthy is there someone is there a family member who is alone or struggling can you offer something to that person once every few days it's it's really as small as that and and it's also big like

learning a new skill or I have a friend who called me yesterday she decided she wants to learn how to compost so because she's home and she has a yard so she's learning how to compost I mean so there's there's the fun stuff my sister just started learning how to make masks I never knew she knew how to sew so you know we all have this stuff but and it's talking with your friends about it like you know I'm stuck what I need to do something what can I do talk to me you know it's as it's as simple as that and by the way if you had an internship that went away that implies that you have some field in which you have an interest go online and find out what virtual conversations are happening in that area are there any conferences going online I'm being bombarded with webinars that never were online so sign up for one every week I mean you can you can add that to your repertoire so you come out of this with even deeper knowledge in your area of interest so one more question I suppose would be this is from me and it's not from the Q&A so I apologize to the Q&A but for both of you is there a really concrete example of grit or resilience that you feel it would be impactful to share with the audience of something that you think really exemplifies grit or resilience on a deeper level from our personal lives yeah from either your personal life or from your experience as a I guess your personal life as a professional either on a project or just however you want to take that question I'll jump in I mean there's so the problem is there's so many examples it's hard to think of all of them so I'll just jump in with one that's top of mind um it took a job when I took a job when I was um excuse me I'm going to start this again I took a position as an executive in a large company a national company and the company went through massive change while I was there and I was part of the reason I was part of the driver of change long story short after a couple of years the CEO was fired for political reasons nothing to do with performance and the CEO had brought me to the company to help change the company so you can fill that like in when the CEO gets fired and you're brought in by the CEO you're gone so within a few months you know I wasn't fired I was just I had a great package and they said bye-bye and I was on a roll and I was really devastated because I was um loving the work the work was the toughest work I ever did in my life and um my colleague met me in the garage the parking garage with a box from the London shop called pink there's the very fancy shop called pink he had a box with with from pink and he handed me the box he had just come from London and I said to him you're giving me a pink slip aren't you and he said yep and he said I love you but you came in with a CEO and sorry you know politically I can't save you and I learned I learned that was one of many many circumstances where I had to really regroup take time step back and think about where I wanted to be in my life and I actually opted not to go back into corporate America on long story short. I just you know for me I go back to my life in the Air Force and when we're in the middle of things going on in Iraq and I was told that I was going to deploy to our Air Operations Center in the Middle East and this was several months before my daughter was supposed to get married and they could not tell us you know how long we were going to be deployed and my wife says you're going to be back for the wedding arts you and I said I don't know but you know this is what I've committed my life to and therefore I have to go do this so that's one of those

things where you just you take it one day at a time you get there you do your job you focus and you hope and pray that you do come home and you know there's a lot of grit and resilience there I think when you're you're out there you're doing a job you're working seven days a week at Keith Lee 16, 18 hours every day and it just on and on and on and on and on and yet the good news is that you know we've finished I got home I got to enjoy my daughter's wedding but you know that's you really kind of see can I do this you know and how's my family going to respond and how do I keep them you know positive through all this and those are some challenging times and they'll come in different forms and fashions but just like Carol I mean there are old things that are good thrown at you that you just don't expect all right so here's the last question for the forum what's your advice with the next simple steps for us walk us through a daily plan if you have one I'll give you my daily plan in some sense but first of all have a plan you know when you get up in the morning job one as I said I think you know for me it's starting off with with exercise with prayer and meditation you know with reading the Bible those kind of things to just kind of center yourself so I would say have some practices that center yourself to start the morning have some things and we'll kind of talk about this passing things you want to do that you enjoy passing times of rest passing times of growth passing times of relationship and structure your day don't just let it flow but Carol let you add to that well I'm not going to add much wisdom to that because what you're talking about are really healthy practices for me I'm not someone who's a I don't like to exercise first thing in the morning so what I what I've created for myself is a routine in the morning that works for me which is I like I love making really good coffee and I listen to I'll pick well sometimes I listen to music I either listen to fabulous music that I just love and or I'll listen to a webinar or something on YouTube that I've wanted to listen to someone I follow and so having coffee I'm feeding my dog I'm doing it that's my centering and then so I don't open my emails I don't wake up and open my emails it's a really bad practice to do that so it I think the message is something that gives you an oomph a center some joy and then the rest is what Larry said you must build in and plan it when am I going to do my exercise what am I going to do some exercise I have you know you don't want to sit at your computer from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. that's not healthy if you like this and you want to hear more like share review and subscribe to this podcast and from all of us here at the Veritas Forum thank you