

What I've Learned through the COVID Lockdowns – John Sweetman

The COVID lockdowns have been tough on everyone and many churches have found them especially difficult. But in testing times there are always things to learn. Here are some of the tongue-in-cheek things I have discovered through the lockdowns.

1. *My phone battery discharges at a rate proportional to the severity of the lockdown.* The more I'm stuck at home the quicker my phone runs out of batteries. At the height of the lockdown, my phone battery was flat out making it to lunchtime. In more normal times, it has no problem lasting all day. My phone battery was clearly protesting the lockdowns.
2. *You can never master Zoom.* No matter how many Zoom meetings and conferences I attend, I still run into unexpected problems with the hardware/software. The other day, my video stopped working – no one could see me. I have two webcams, but I could get nothing. Where did that come from? It's never happened before. Then there is some secret button I somehow push and everyone magically disappears from my screen. I continue to nod along at the camera wondering whether I will ever see these people again. I'm sure Zoom has been designed to keep you dependent on your children. As for Microsoft Teams, well that's a complete mystery to me.
3. *Fast reliable wifi is essential.* In the middle of the lockdowns, I upgraded to a mesh system. I was tired of chairing meetings in which I only heard half of the conversation due to constant freezes. It certainly kept me on my toes, trying to guess what was said while I nodded and tried to look engaged with a frozen screen, but it was increasing my blood pressure too much. That computer message "wifi unstable" still sends shivers down my spine.
4. *Masks are such a pain.* I thought that I might reach a stage when wearing a mask was hardly noticeable. Nope! I can't speak properly. I can't hear what others are saying. I can't breathe normally. And I can't recognise bald people. When all you've got is eyes to go by, I've got nothing. I've realised that I could never work in the medical profession. I'm not a mask man.
5. *I have become even more of a hypochondriac.* A small cough and I'm consigning myself to a ventilator in my mind. I blame it on the doctors. Early on in the lockdowns I went to the doctor. I must admit that I didn't read all the warning signs outside the surgery. So when I waltzed in and admitted to the lady at the desk that I had a runny nose (not even a man flu), all the alarms went off and I was immediately escorted from the surgery and made to wait like an outcast on the footpath with passer-bys muttering and shaking their heads. You can imagine what that did to my hypochondria.
6. *I miss the gym.* I thought that I would never say that. The gym and I have a rather chequered relationship. But when I couldn't go for weeks on end, I began to miss those workout sessions. I tried to replace my gym exercise with doing push ups – one extra every day, starting at five. That may have been okay for a one week lockdown, but when the gyms were closed for over a month, I realised that I had made a serious mistake in my exercise regime commitment.
7. *I can now sleep in.* For 20 years or more I have woken between 4.30 and 5.30am every morning. Deb and I have a rule that the last one out makes the bed. I did not make the bed in 20 years. Seriously. Something happened in the lockdowns. I can sleep in until 7.00am. It's certainly pleasant, but now I have to work out how those 50 cushions fit on the quilt.
8. *I really am an introvert.* I already knew this, but the lockdowns confirmed it. I found myself listening to the daily updates, secretly hoping that the lockdown would last a few days longer so that I could stay sequestered in our unit (in Caloundra with a view), thinking and writing and resting and making that bed. Only communicating with others by email or Zoom (when it works). Now that's an introvert for you.