

# Ice Breaker Activity – 10 minutes

Breakout in groups and answer the following questions (each person answers only one question of their choice).

1. What's the most amazing idea you had today?
2. What song best describes you today?
3. What's the most outrageous thing you saw today?
4. What's something that made you look twice today?

# Rebuilding a Culture of Connection in a Post-Pandemic World

2022 Spring FLEX session

Thursday, February 3, 2022

Facilitator: Dr. Dianne Van Hook



**“We were standing on one side of a massive river of uncertainty and hardship...we’re now seeing the other side of the river.”** ~*Christine Lagarde*

**We can look to horizon and have hope.**

# Here is what we will explore today!

- Where Are We Today?
- Are We Experiencing a Loneliness Epidemic?
- How Can We Counteract Loneliness?
- What is Our Culture of Connection?
- How Do We Create a Culture of Connection?
- How Do We Develop Connection Skills and Connect?

**“It has never been clearer that tackling big problems requires people working together.” ~ Bill Gates**



# Where Are We Today?

- Just as we thought we were stumbling toward normalcy, we are faced with new variants of the COVID virus.
- Everyday, as more research comes out, knowledge changes on how this virus is transmitted, how it can be prevented, and how it can be treated.
- The more information we receive, the more confusing it can be.
- Sometimes, it's hard to keep up with ever-changing details, rules and recommendations.
- It's hard to focus.
- And, truth be told, it's lonely!



The pandemic has challenged the way we live and learn, and has altered the way we relate to one another which makes **building a culture of connection** even more relevant.

# The More Information We Have Received, The More Confused We Have Become



# Video - The Importance of Human Connection

**The Importance of Human Connection | Simon Sinek –  
1:58**

<https://youtu.be/jVSYsINdMSo>



# Much Has Changed Since the Start of the Pandemic

It's 2022. After a year-and-a-half, alternating between lockdowns and new outbreaks, life can finally begin returning to normal. But, it will not be the old normal.

- An **elbow bump** is the new acceptable greeting.
- **Outdoor socializing** is in - business trips are out.
- Multiple department stores and retail store closures have triggered a **wave of malls shutting for good**.
- **Visits to theme-parks are different** as pandemic-era precautions remain in place - social distancing markers, requests to mask up, mobile food and beverage ordering, self-service check-ins at kiosks, and interactive smartphone park maps displaying attractions wait times and virtual queues.
- Those unfamiliar with applications like **Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and Google Meet** took the plunge and learned. And what many learned is it's not as hard as they thought – these are here to stay.
- Demand for rapid at-home tests skyrocketed at the start of the Delta and Omicron variances. A growing number of people are turning to **self-swabbing before socializing**.
- Other pandemic-related precautions here to stay include:
  - ✓ Using QR codes to pull up menus at restaurants
  - ✓ Ordering groceries for pickup or delivery online
  - ✓ Doing more via technology



# What Matters Now

As the post-pandemic world continues to open up, little by little, day by day, we still wonder, each day, what the future will look like as we go forward. It is a defining moment in time – a time when we have the opportunity to help design what the future will look like. The good news is that as things have unfrozen, the need for flexibility has inspired creativity.



# **Video – The Simple Things Matter Illinois Mom Makes Device to Let Kids Safely Hug Grandma**

**Illinois Mom Makes Device to Let Kids Safely Hug  
Grandma – 1:18**

<https://youtu.be/664D6Bcg3lg>

# Many Things on the Outside Have Changed

Many things on the outside have changed. **What exists now is different than it was prior to March 2020.** What was not acceptable before is now fine!

- Alcoholic beverages to go
- Dining on the street
- Turning tax returns in late
- Virtual doctor appointments
- Brown Act requirements regarding teleconferencing (Board can operate via Zoom)

And, we have a chance to influence and create how we will move forward. As we do that, we need to consider the role **human connection** plays in all of our lives.

# **So, are We Experiencing a Loneliness Epidemic?**

# COVID Abruptly Changed Life As We Knew It

In March 2020, COVID-19 emerged as a global pandemic.

Between March 11 and March 19, 2020:

- The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic
- President Trump declared the coronavirus a national emergency
- California became the first state to issue a stay-at-home order, mandating all residents to stay at home except to go to an essential job or shop for essential needs.
- The pandemic resulted in requirements for social distancing, quarantine, and isolation so that vulnerable individuals were not exposed to the virus and healthcare systems were not overwhelmed.

And...



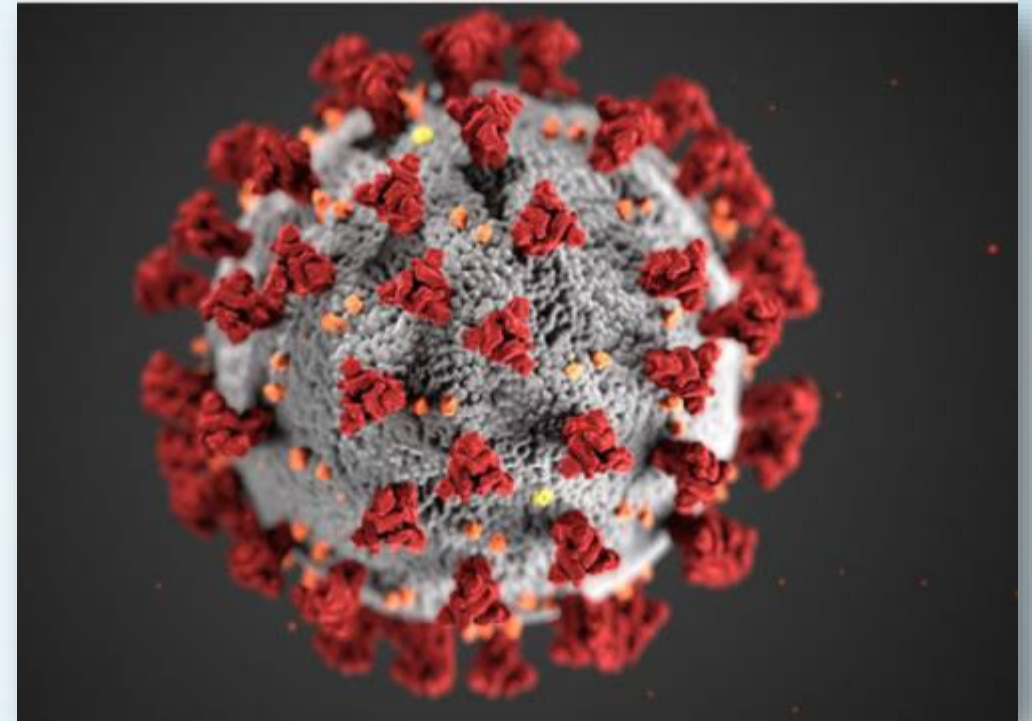
Dr. Barbara Ferrer, the public health director for Los Angeles County, speaks at a press conference on the novel coronavirus on March 6 in Los Angeles.  ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

# COVID is Not the Only Epidemic We Are Facing

In the wake of a tumultuous two years, filled with months of uncertainty, isolation and loneliness, many of us are feeling detached and disconnected.

Our nation is experiencing epic loneliness – with three in five (**61%**) of adults self-reporting loneliness.

COVID is not the only epidemic we are facing. We are in the midst of an **epidemic of loneliness** which started with the lockdown announced by our Governor on March 19, 2020.



# Quarantine and Social Distancing Led to a Time Warp

For many of us, the first two week of the quarantine seemed like an eternity and impossible to handle.

The most frequently asked questions I received were:

- When will we get back to normal?
- When can I come back to campus?
- How are we going to do this?

And, the most common comments were:

- I don't like this
- I don't know if I can do this
- It makes me mad





# The Impact of Social Distancing

Depending on the timeframe at hand at any given moment, social distancing guidelines recommended that we stay at least 6 feet away from others outside our households; mask up; stay home; and limit the number of people who could be together in one place.

Social distancing led to an increase in:

- Remote working
- Remote or online education
- Cancellation of sporting, entertainment, and professional events; weddings; vacations; and proms.
- Closures of museums, parks, churches and much more
- Postponement of health issues/surgery
- Not being able to be with people
- Rethinking the value added benefits of a college education/degree seeking focus
- Less formality
- Less vacationing
- Isolation
- Loneliness
- Skewed perspectives
- Immense sadness and feelings of loss



# Video – The Human Connection

**The Human Connection – 6:31** (Examples of how some people tried to stay connected during lock downs)

<https://youtu.be/nHZ-C08fgEU>

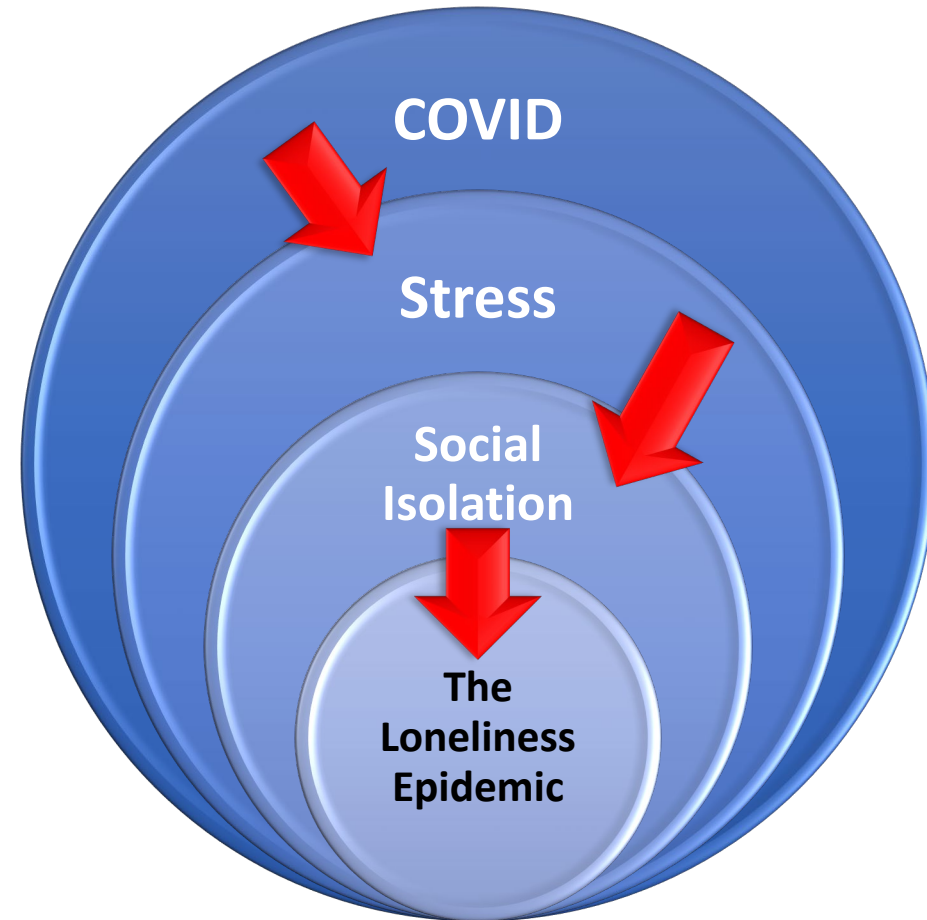
# The Ripple Effect: COVID, Stress, and Social Isolation

- The COVID-19 pandemic was and still is the biggest threat in living memory to health and well-being, social welfare, and the global economy.
- Disruption of the pandemic caused immense stress, feelings of fear, depression, and anxiety. Many worried that they or a love one would:
  - ✓ Contract COVID
  - ✓ Lose their job due to the economic recession
  - ✓ Become financially vulnerable due to the declining value of their savings
  - ✓ Be unable to pay their bills
- Social distancing caused a collapse in social contact and interactions with others outside of our households (family, friends, and entire communities).

The overwhelming disruption and uncertainty combined with social isolation contributed to the loneliness epidemic.

Studies show that within the first month of COVID, loneliness increased by **20 to 30 percent**, and emotional distress tripled.

***And, what did that lead to? We had to change!***



**Being under lock down was challenging for many – especially our students, according to these quotes pulled from our student surveys.**

*Too many distractions at home/unable to focus*

“It is hectic having everyone home, and having to balance school and work on top of that.”

“I live with a family of 5 and taking tests is extremely difficult because of all the distractions and noise. It becomes very difficult and overwhelming.”

“I live in a 6 person household and it can get pretty loud so there are many distractions and no quiet place where I can study and focus on my work.”

“Not being around other new people nor moving around a lot has had an impact on my mental health. It’s easy for me to fall into feelings of sadness and anxiety within the walls of my room a lot of the time.”

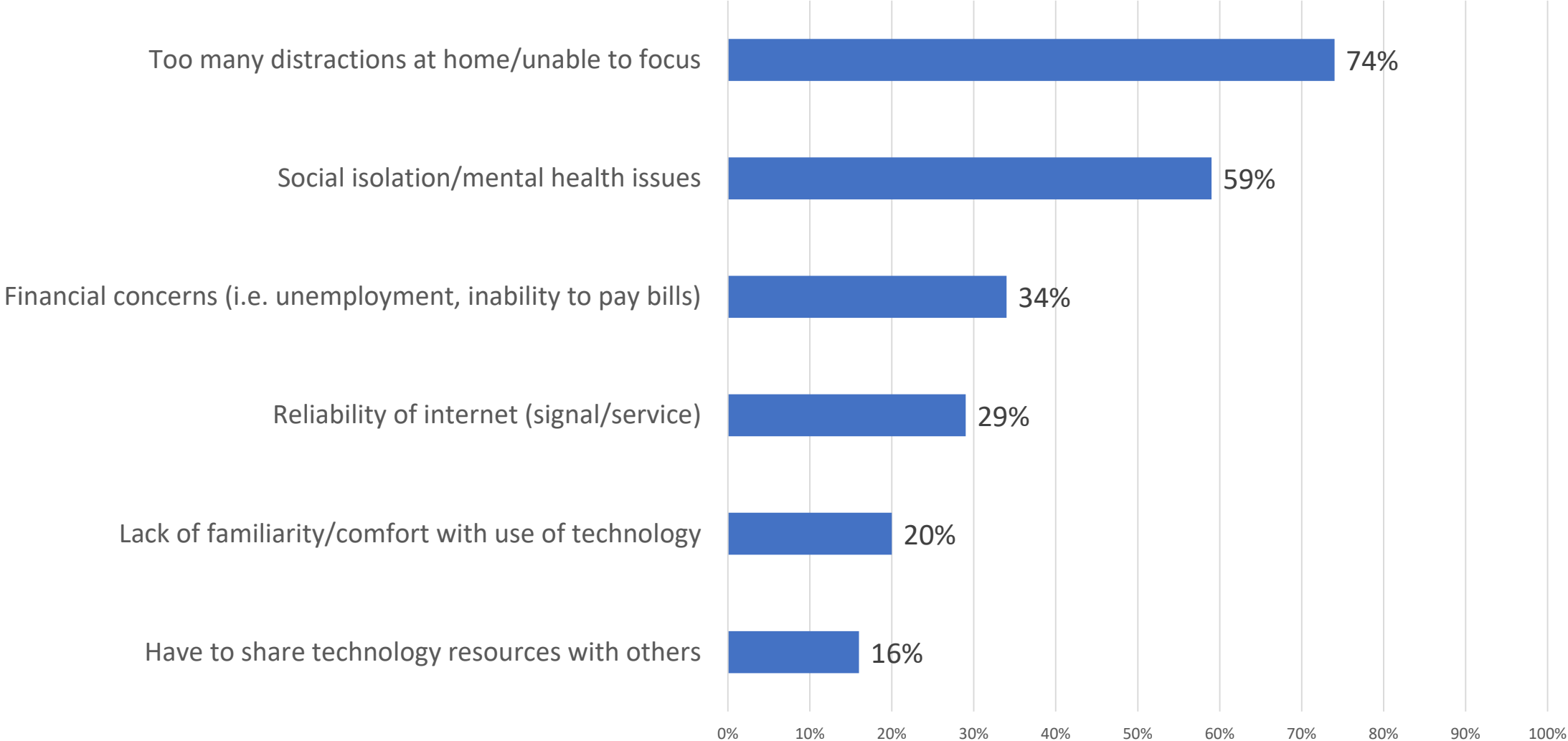
“Leaving the house for school was a great mental health break. I have to put myself on time out to catch a breath

“Sometimes I feel anxiety for uncertain future”

*Social isolation/mental health issues*

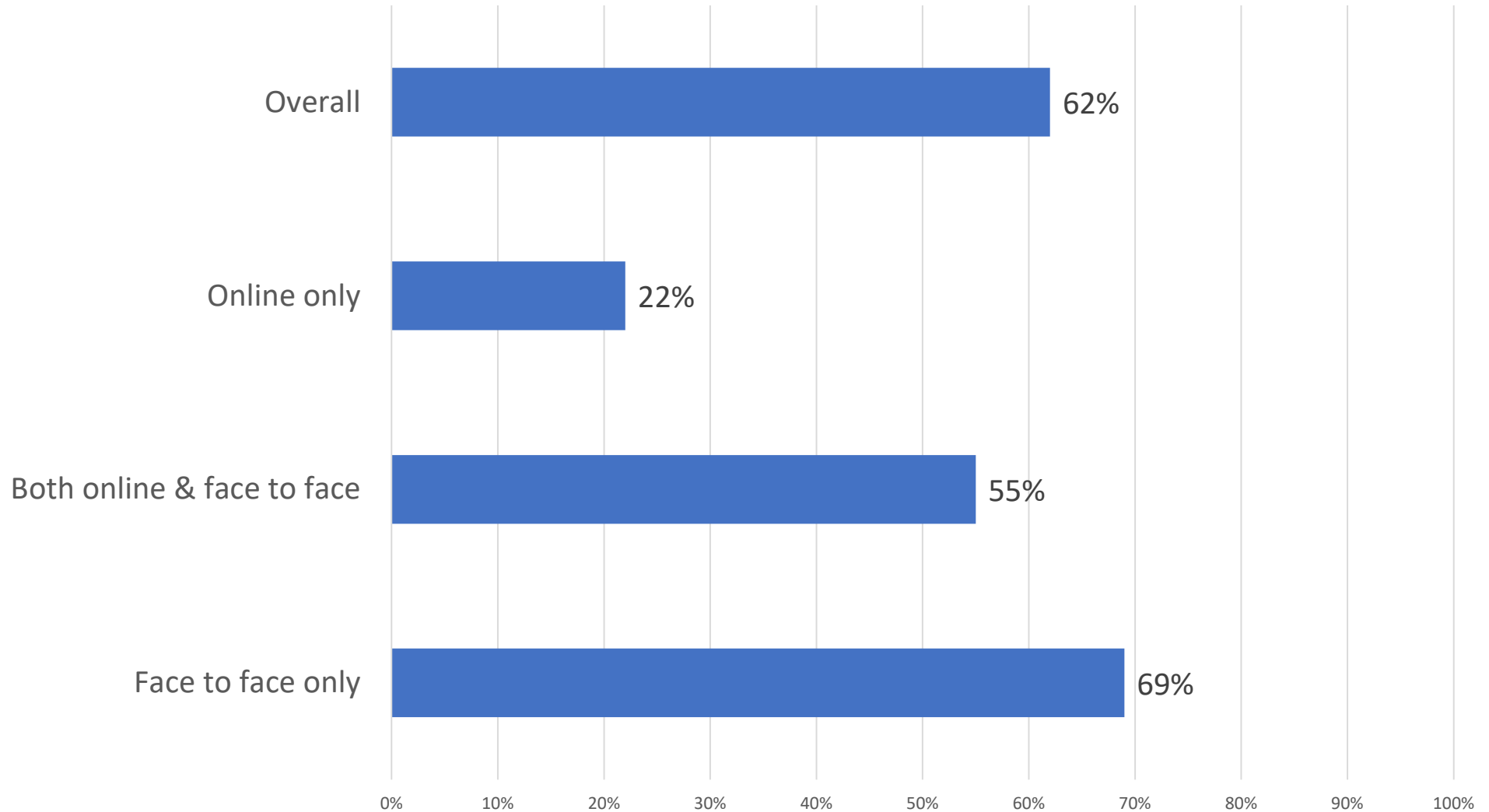
# And, Not Everyone Made the Move Smoothly

## Students' Top Challenges with Remote Learning



*Q: Compared to on-campus format, which describes your learning experience in remote/online format?*

**Students who answered "I am not able to learn as well"**



# *Whether You Like Remote or Not -* **There is No Substitute for Human Connection**

The way we connect digitally is different than the way we connect in-person.

- Human connection is an innate need to create social relationships with others. Given the complexity of human connection, it's nearly impossible to recreate online the kind of social interaction we get offline.
- It is imperative for our mental health to have a true connection with other humans, intimate conversation with eye contact and touch, an empathetic heart in the presence of others and open ears when asking about their well-being.
- Our world consists of emails, laptop screens, mobile devices, and instant messaging. We skip from app to app, struggling for human connection, all while staying stuck from behind our screens.
- Yet, we can get a much better feeling face-to-face than we can from behind a screen.

***Bottom line – there is no substitute for being there!***

# **Video – Garbage trucks lead birthday parade for boy battling terminal illness**

**Garbage trucks lead birthday parade in Anthem for boy battling terminal illness – 1:18**

<https://youtu.be/NtfQFpr0sE0>



# Negative Outcomes Led to Loneliness & Social Isolation

Loneliness is associated with negative outcomes including depression.

According to recent research, loneliness:

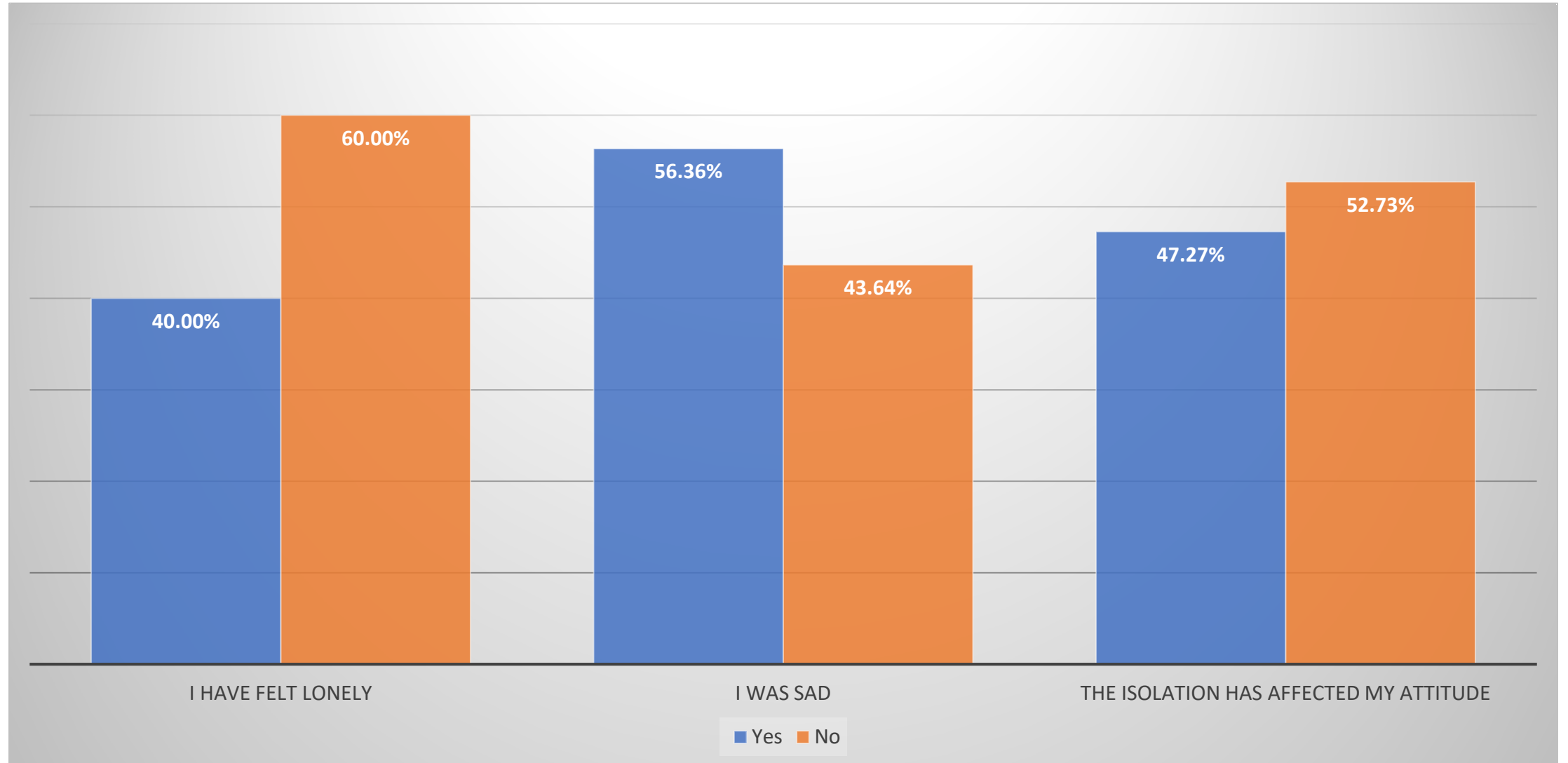
- Increases vulnerability to other stressors
- Contributes to greater feelings of helplessness
- Decreases sleep quality
- Diminishes willpower to exercise and eat healthy

Immediate effects of social isolation related to the pandemic have already been observed, with surges in mental health concerns, substance abuse, and domestic violence.

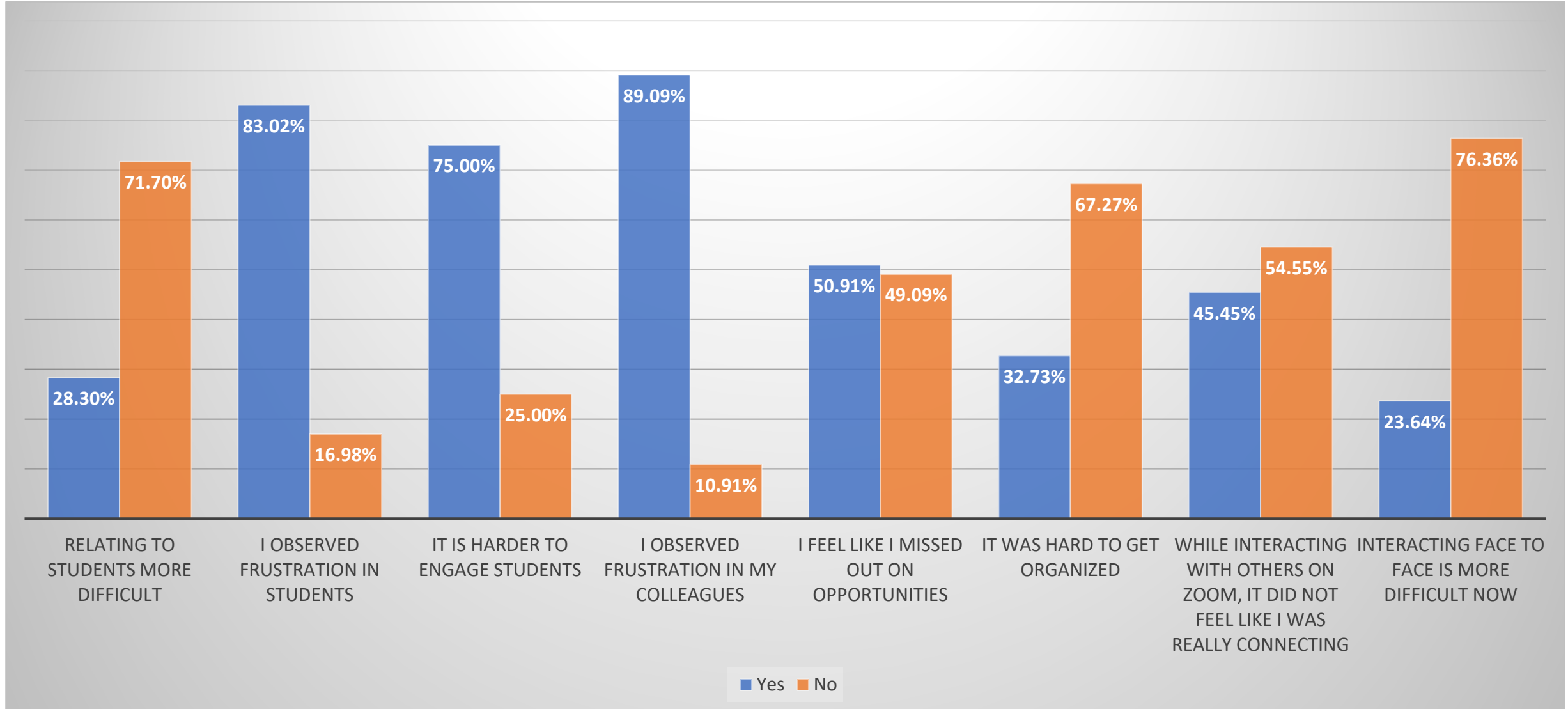
Recent research reveals that loneliness and isolation are associated with a **50%** risk of early death and can be as damaging to health as smoking **15** cigarettes a day.

**In response to the overwhelming feelings of loneliness and social isolation, people had to make an effort to intentionally stay connected...but how?**

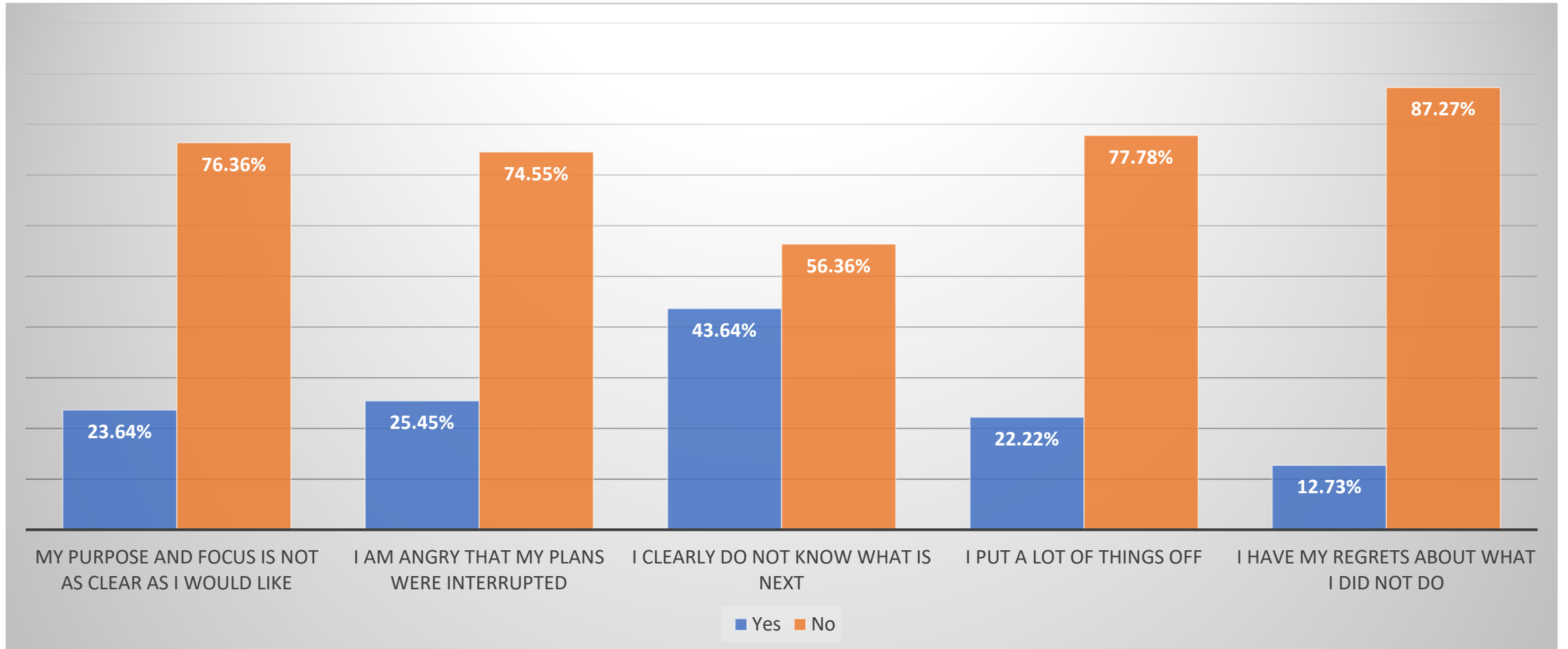
# Rebuilding a Culture of Connection Pre-Survey 2022



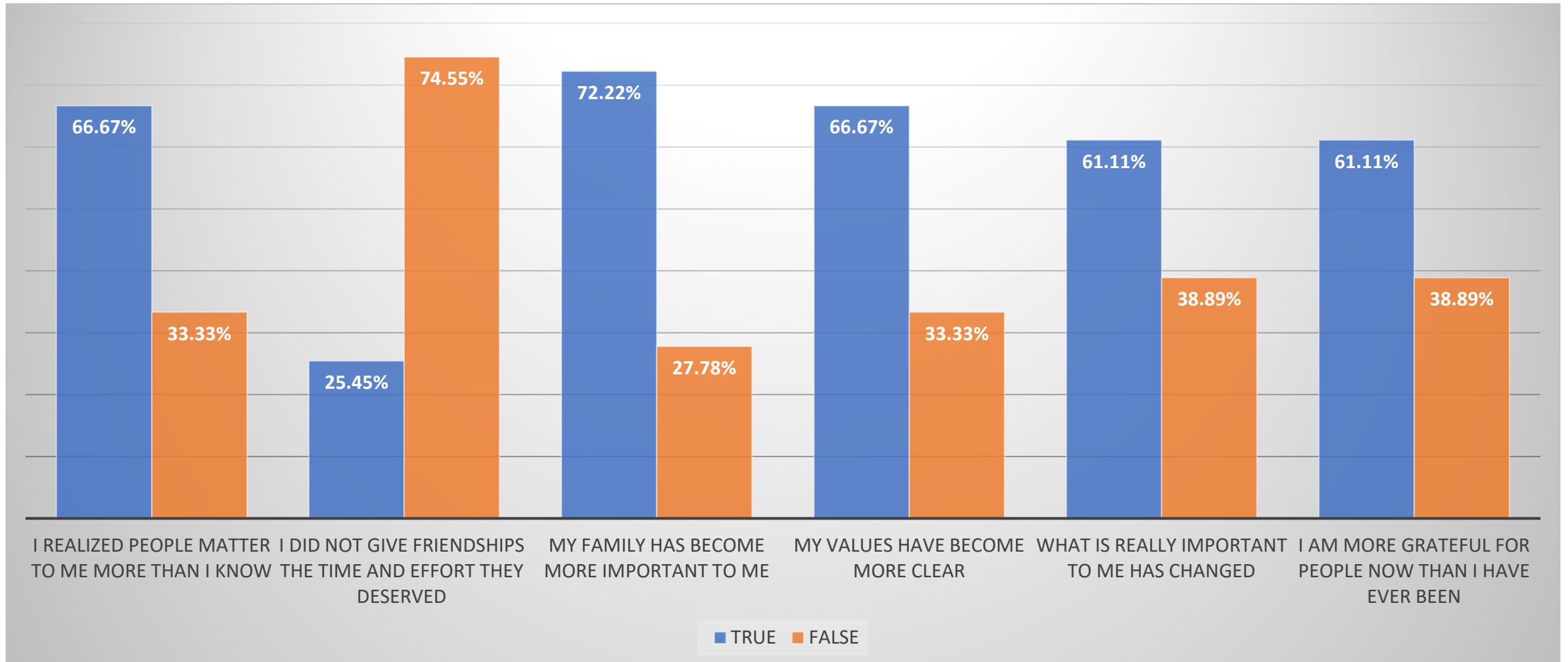
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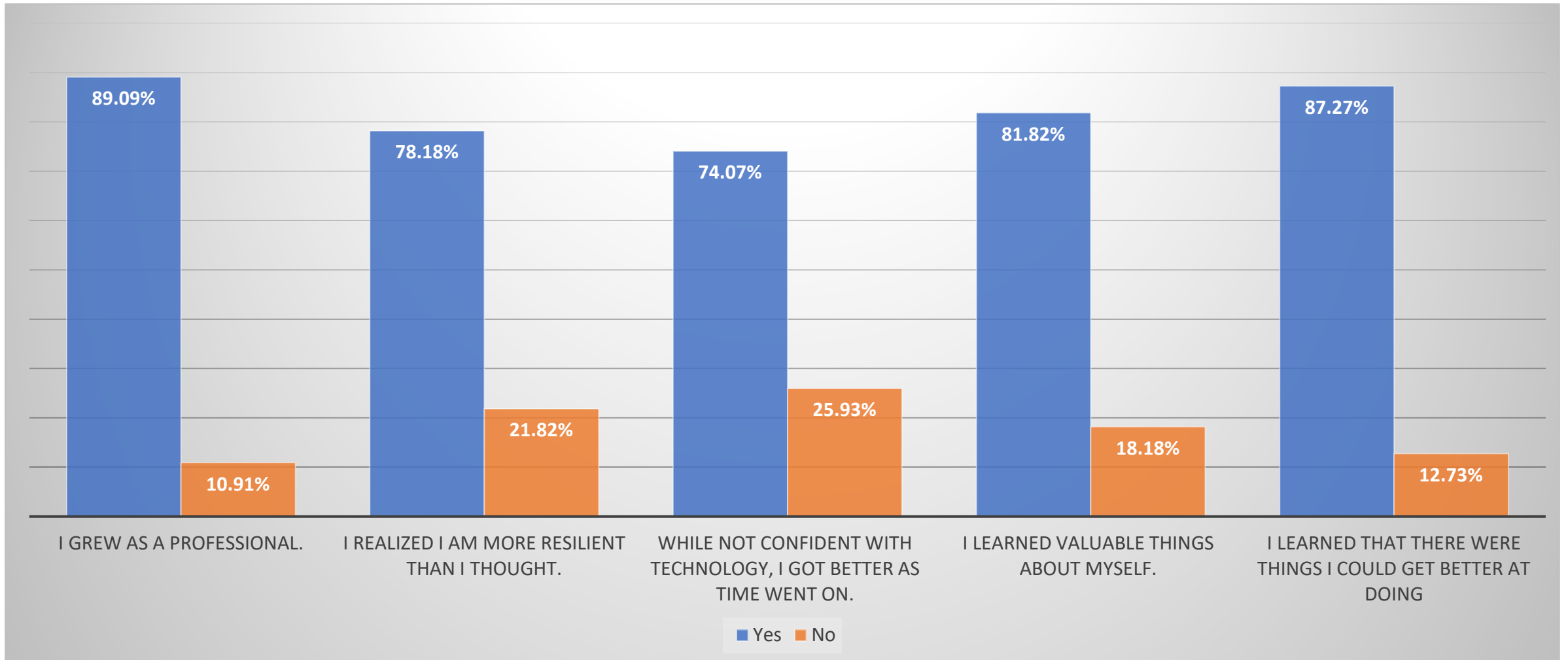
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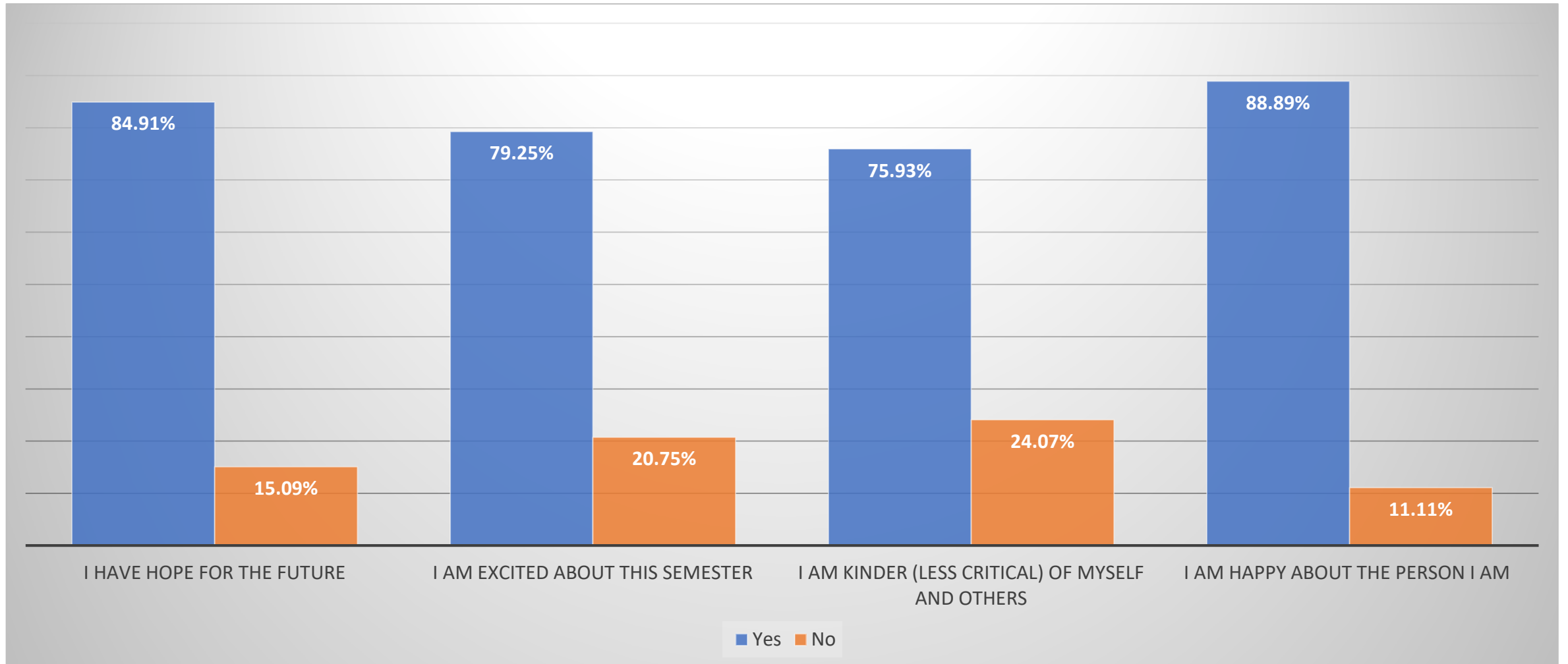
# Rebuilding a Culture of Connection Pre-Survey 2022



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# Getting Clear About Our “Why”

In a world that is evolving faster than ever before, one question is asked repeatedly... “Why?”

The desire to make meaning of the world – and to find our purpose within it – is a basic part of our human nature.

Our purpose is the reason why we exist.

**At COC, our purpose is to serve our students.** We view every decision and take every action through the lens of that purpose.

**We are driven by purpose. And, boy, does it show!**



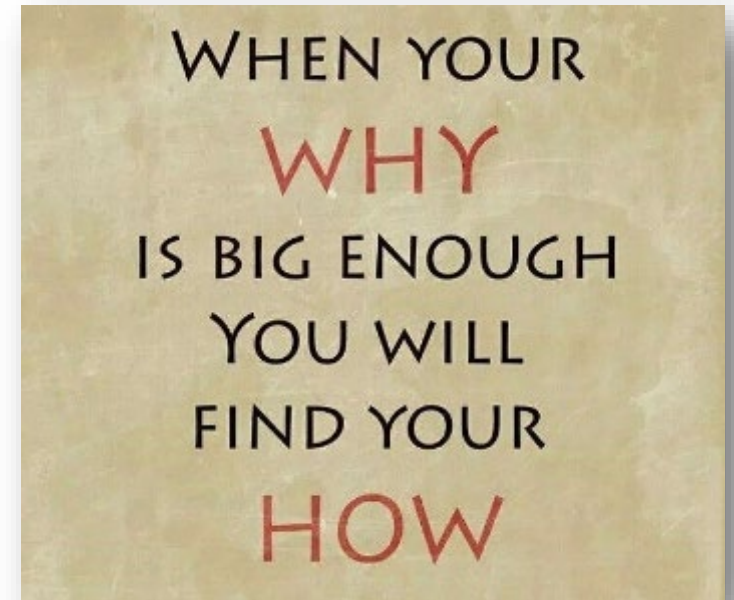


# How Do We Lead with Purpose?

In the post-pandemic future, we all will need to lead differently with greater self-awareness and genuine connection with others – **everyone united behind a bold purpose.**

*How do we lead with purpose?*

- Become clear on the vision and purpose
- Articulate this vision to others to inspire them to set aside their own egos and move forward together.
- Ensure everyone understands how their contributions align with a purpose bigger than themselves.



It is each of our responsibilities to help support others and to remain motivated and aligned as they journey into uncharted territory. They need to see the “True North” of an embodying purpose – the “why” of the journey. What is universal to all is the importance that everyone understands that specific “why”.

# Reinforce Our Shared Purpose

Where there is purpose, there is hope – even exceeding what anyone thought possible. Purpose can lead others from “what we’ve been” to “what we will be”.

During the pandemic, we were all feeling our way through the dark. And, we will going forward. But we are getting better and better at making our way with confidence.

- Everything happening around us was beyond our control.
- We had no choice but to rise above, to be resilient, to drive change, to look forward.
- We had to make decisions while uncertain of the outcomes – making our paths as we walked them – and course-correcting our way to safety.
- We stayed focused on moving forward.
- We were forced to take a step back and to recognize our priorities and what really matters – **for me, it is being kind and nice!**

**You don't have  
to see the whole  
staircase, just  
take the first  
step.**

***Martin Luther  
King, Jr.***

# At COC, our purpose is to serve our students!



# Yet, Enrollments Dropped Because of the Pandemic

It's official – fall 2021 marked a steep, two-year decline in enrollments at post-secondary institutions.

According to data released by the *National Student Clearinghouse*:

- Decline in enrollments brings the total loss of potential undergraduate student since the beginning of the pandemic to **1,025,600**.
- Last year, most enrollment declines were in community colleges.
- This year, we're seeing bachelor's seeking students making up about half of the decline.
- Drop in enrollments are mostly COVID-related.
- Biggest drops in enrollment are in programs that are applied or hands-on including mechanical repair, precision production, welding, and culinary arts (these programs draw students who desire in-person learning).
- Focus needs to shift from enrollment numbers to retention numbers.

***Let's hear from our ASG students and learn what they are doing to connect students.***

In the Spotlight

**ASG – THE RE CAMPAIGN**

A night sky filled with stars and constellations, with a dark mountain range silhouette at the bottom. The stars are scattered across the dark blue and black sky, with some brighter stars and constellations visible. The mountains at the bottom are dark and silhouetted against the lighter sky.

**“Culture is a celebration of what we hold as important – what we believe and hold sacred.” ~ Khoi Tu**

What does Purpose, Building Community,  
Strengthening Relationships, Mentoring, and  
Coaching Lead To?

**A Culture of Connection**

# What Happens When We Feel Connected?

Connection is a superpower!

Feeling connected makes individuals more productive, more creative, more energetic, more effective, and happier.

When people feel connected to a group, they are more likely to:

- Give their best efforts
- Align their behavior with the organization's goals
- More fully communicate
- Participate in helping the organization innovate and improve

When we are able to create a “connection culture”, people develop supportive, cooperative, and collaborative relationships. After 24 months of varying stages of isolation, now more than ever, **it is an essential time in history to cultivate a culture of connection.**





# A Culture of Connection Builds Relationships and Unity

A culture of connection produces task and relationship excellence.

In a connection culture:

- People care about others and care about their work because it benefits other human beings.
- People are inspired to develop healthy relationships and reach out to others in need, rather than being indifferent to them.
- All individuals are recognized for having something to bring to the table based on their experiences and background.



This bond of connection helps overcome the differences that historically divided people, creating a sense of community and unity that is inclusive and energized, and spurs productivity and innovation.

# In the Spotlight

**JOANNA KELLY  
CANYONS CARES**

# Declines in California Community Colleges Enrollment Amid Ongoing COVID Strain

- Enrollment in California Community Colleges (CCC) fell an estimated **15%** year over year in 2020-21, a drop of almost **319,000** students.
- CCC enrollments dropped below **2 million** students for the first time in **30 years**.
- Nationwide undergraduate enrollment dropped **3.4%** in fall 2020 compared to the prior year with community colleges showing steeper declines at **9%**.
- CCC enrollment declines were steepest among African American, Native American, and male students as well as students age 25 and older.
- CCCs saw a loss of about **100,000** students aged 40 or older (nationwide Black, Native American and male student enrollments were also among the steepest declines).

**Where did they go and why? What are we doing about it?**

# In the Spotlight

**JASMINE RUYS & SARAH COX  
BANC HOUSING INITIATIVE**

# Video – Motivational Sister – Hello Humankindness

**Motivational Sister – Hello Humankindness | Dignity  
Health – 0:30**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaiiTZLDIzY>

# A Culture of Connection Helps Us Thrive

Humans are not machines – we have emotions, hopes and dreams, and a conscience.

Humans also have **universal needs** that must be met to thrive:

- Respect
- Recognition
- Belonging
- Autonomy
- Personal growth
- Meaning
- Progress



**We need to know that someone cares...**

# Feeling Connected to People

When these three needs are met, we feel connected to the people we work with and to our students.

- **Respect** – When we are courteous and considerate to people, they feel respected.
- **Recognition** – When we recognize people and voice their strengths, they feel valued and emotionally safe.
- **Belonging** – When we create a sense of belonging for people, encourage them, and show them that we care, they feel supported, they develop confidence, and become more resilient to cope with life's inevitable difficulties.



**“If you create a great place to work, great work takes place.” ~Ben Peterson**





# Meaningful Work Leads to Positive Results

These two needs are linked and when they are met, **we see positive results.**

- **Meaning/Contribution** – When people are engaged and connected, they feel appreciated, valued, and are inspired to put forth their best efforts.
- **Progress** – Finally, one can see progress and positive results which leads to improved outcomes. We are in our most innovative and productive space when we are feeling a sense of positivity about what we are doing.



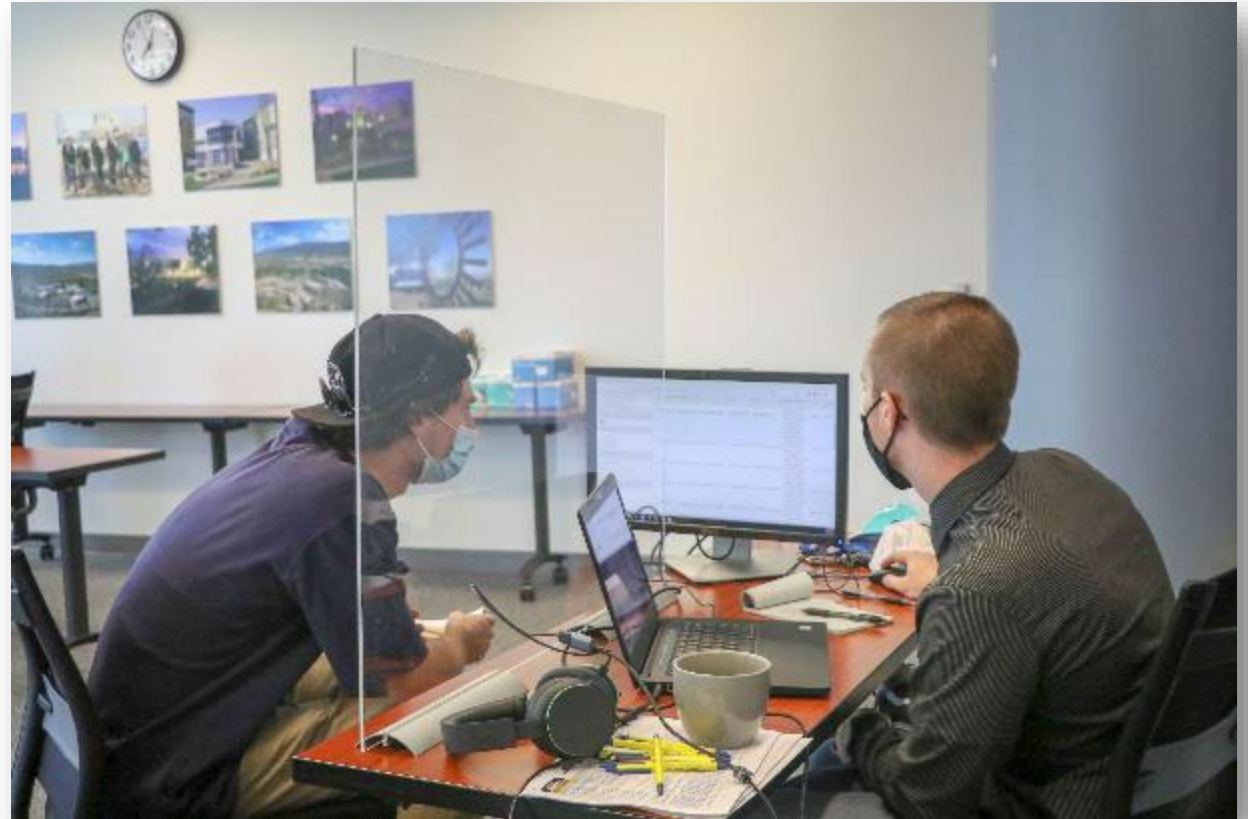
# Meaningful Work Has Consistently Produced Positive Outcomes at COC!

- Developed COC's COVID-19 plan to ensure compliance with L.A. County Department of Public Health Higher Education protocols; to provide testing and vaccination sites on campus; and to provide vaccination appointments for all employees at Henry Mayo.
- Developed a safe Return to Campus process including a communications plan to help ensure a smooth transition of students and employees from remote operations back to on-campus learning and service delivery.
- Ensured allocation of \$3.1M in CARES funding and \$800,000 in COVID Block Grant Federal Funding.
- Identified a site to launch the Advanced Technology Center, a state-of-the-art advanced manufacturing and CNC production lab that includes both simulation and full production type machining centers to prepare student to demonstrate the necessary skills for workforce readiness.
- Established the Call to Action Coalition to ensure we are making progress on the Call to Action Objectives.
- Created a Call to Action website where DEI materials and information about student alliances can be found.
- Expanded scope of IEPI to include Vision for Success goals.
- Offered 1100 professional development opportunities
- Organized the opening of the Multicultural Center
- Produced Chancellor's video update messages to students
- Hosted regular Coronavirus Update webinars to update employees on latest developments
- Fully transitioned all Employee Training Institute (ETI) classes and programs to online delivery format.
- Added eight new short term training programs for unemployed and underemployed individual seek employment.
- Developed and launched ETI's Low Observable Technician Pathway program in partnership with Northrop Grumman.
- Trained 362 employees at 82 companies for a total of 5,449 contact hours of training.
- Increased Student Services hours of operation during the pandemic
- Increased support services during the pandemic – including mental health outreach to students

# A Connection Culture is a Win-Win For All of Us!

Fostering connection in the workplace is a win-win for individuals and organizations. Connection is the key to help you thrive personally and professionally. It affects the health of your family, workplace, volunteer organizations, and community.

Humans cannot thrive without it.



# How Do We Create a Culture of Connection?

# How Do Connections Happen?

Connection happens with deliberate action.

Each and every day, we face the deliberate choice of forging connections or pushing others away.

That's not the way we work in today's collaborative world. We need others – everyone does.

Most of us want the same basic thing – when asked, *“What is it like to work there? What are the people like?”* What's really being asked is simply, *“How will I fit in?”*

We want to feel valued, to belong, to be a part of something bigger than ourselves.



# What Are the Primary Elements of a Connection Culture?

The primary elements of a connection culture are: **shared identity, shared empathy, and shared understanding.**

- **Shared identity** is how people think of themselves – it's their story or narrative, including their values and reputation. When people share an identity that inspires them and makes them feel proud, it creates a sense of connection among members of the team.
- **Shared empathy** is increased when people get to know and care for one another. Valuing people in and of themselves, rather than means to an end, is key. As empathy increases, people become more considerate and compassionate.
- **Shared understanding** arises when members of the team are informed and are in the know and are informed on matters important to them. Their opinions and ideas are sought and considered. There is conversation and communication which produces a knowledge flow that results in shared understanding.

# Shared Identity

People feel connected to their work because of the team's focused effort and when they know that their individual contribution makes a meaningful difference.

A shared sense of identify develops as their language and behaviors communicate the importance of the work and how the work is producing positive results.

They feel they:

- Are creating something new or doing something bigger than themselves.
- Have a clear strategy and direction with a common mission and goals.
- Can make a difference in their role.
- Are proud to tell their family and friends that they work and attend college at this great place!

2/2/2022



# Shared Empathy

People feel valued as human beings, rather than being treated as a means to an end. They have leaders who:

- Care about them
- Take the time to get to know them
- Help them get into the right roles so they can continue to learn and grow
- Encourage them when they do good work, give them autonomy, and keep them challenged but didn't chronically overload them with so much work that they have no work-life balance.

A sense of shared empathy develops among staff and students as their attitudes, language, and behaviors communicate that they are valued as individuals.





# Shared Understanding

People who believe they are kept informed about important matters and feel that they have a voice – their opinions and ideas matter develop a shared understanding as their attitudes, language, and behaviors increase communication.

They feel:

- Safe to speak, to disagree, and to try new things.
- Their opinion counts.
- Their environment is creative and innovative.
- They are kept in the loop.
- People are open and speak the truth and are able to try!
- And, when they try – they do!



# In the Spotlight

VIOLETTA KOVACEV-NIKOLIC AND  
RUZANNA BAYTARYAN – MATH  
DEPARTMENT

# At COC, How Have We Counteracted Loneliness?

# The Anecdote to Loneliness

The anecdote to the loneliness epidemic and mental health crisis is **restoring human connection.**

We value connection more than ever! Our students, family members, friends, and community members want to meet face-to-face, socialize, brainstorm, and connect with each other again.

Human connection is how we:

- Build community
- Strengthen relationships
- Mentor and coach
- Reinforce our shared purpose

# Build Community

At COC, we have long fostered a sense of community and connection, and we have been able to build upon our relationships for the betterment of our students.

*As we have returned to campus, how have we continued to support students and promote a sense of belonging?*



# In the Spotlight

**JEANNIE CHARI—  
BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVE**

# Communicate the “We” Factor

- Explain what is going on in a way that is relatable and understandable.
- Be honest about what is known and unknown.
- Acknowledge that the situation is difficult for everyone and that everyone is feeling the stress.
- Recognize people for the good they are doing, their perseverance, and their positive attitude.
- Reinforce that each person has a part to play in working towards a solution – remind others that the mission will be accomplished together.
- Share the spotlight with your collaborators and be sure they are getting the credit they are due.
- Balance hard news with hope – share silver linings and what you believe it will be like on the other side.
- Ask people how they are doing and really listen to what they have to say.

# Strengthen Relationships

High-quality relationships between students and teachers, and students and their peers, have academic and social benefits. Students flourish when they feel valued, connected, respected, and supported. The disruption of the pandemic has led to high levels of stress and trauma among our students; exacerbated challenges of engagement, belonging, and motivation; and led to feelings disconnectedness amidst virtual learning.

## **How can we strengthen relationships to help our students feel connected?**

- Make social-emotional learning, collaboration, and relationships a top priority.
- Assign collaborative group work where students work with others.
- Give students opportunities to share details of their lives (academic and personal experiences) with the larger class, so that they get to know each other better.
- Foster experiences that help students develop strong relationships, collaboration skills, and gain a deeper degree of self-awareness.

**How?**



# Mentor & Coach

Community colleges across the country have implemented mentor programs to stimulate student support and success.

- The concept focuses on pairing a new students with a more experienced student (although mentors can be staff members).
- Oftentimes, mentors will guide new students by helping them set their schedules, providing campus tours, or by offering to serve as an academic tutor or study buddy.
- Research has proven that students who are connected to and feel comfortable at college are more likely to graduate.
- Other benefits of mentor programs include:
  - ✓ Teaches mentees to become more focused, supported, and engaged in their success.
  - ✓ Fosters the creation of a safe and comfortable learning environment.
  - ✓ Establishes a network of support.
  - ✓ Guides mentees on the journey towards self-reliance, successful graduation, and transfer to a four-year institution or job placement.
  - ✓ Helps mentees to confront and overcome personal, academic, and professional challenges; and to establish a stronger sense of self-esteem and confidence.

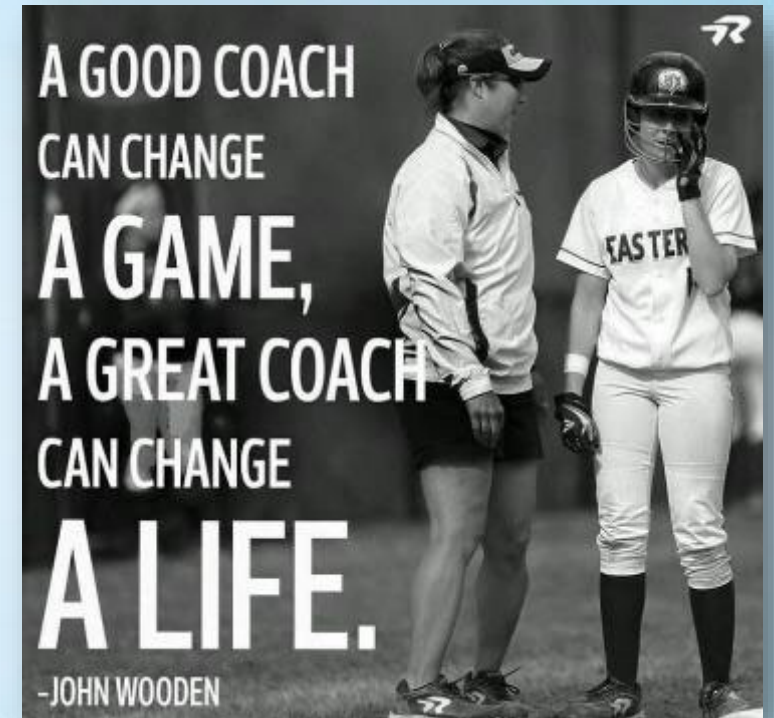
# Coaches Make a Lasting Impact – We Can All Be A Coach To Someone

Without support and help from others, it's nearly impossible take a leap of faith on our own.

A great coach:

- Listens, encourages, inspires, motivates, guides, teaches and supports others.
- Gives us wider perspectives – not telling us what to think, but rather what to think about.
- Offers a guiding hand, a gentle nudge, and a voice of assurance and of reasons that say “don't give up”...stick with it...don't get discouraged...you have the energy to see this through.”
- Energizes them to take the hill, calm the crisis, transform the old way, and achieve their calling.
- Helps us gain clarity about how we see our future and how we can get there.

Coaches believe in us, even before we believe in ourselves. But more than what they say, it's how they make us feel. Their words and actions last a lifetime. We coach every day!



# In the Spotlight

**PATRICIA FOLEY & AMY FOOTE**

A night landscape featuring a full moon and a starry sky. The foreground is a grassy hillside, and the middle ground shows a valley with a layer of fog or mist. The background consists of dark, silhouetted hills under a deep blue night sky filled with stars.

**“When Purpose is Lacking, Disconnection Happens.”** ~*Gary Burnison*

**So, Clarify Purpose!**

**We are bursting out of our cocoons of the pandemic and spreading our wings. The new world belongs to the most agile – and, as we move forward, a new way of leading is required.**

**It takes a strong sense of purpose, awareness of how we impact others, courage to go beyond our comfort zones and challenge old ways of thinking, an inclusive mindset, and the willingness to embrace ambiguity and paradox.**

**~Gary Burnison**



# Move Forward With Hope and Purpose

A sense of purpose always precedes the first step in moving forward. It may take a long time – but if we create solutions and overcome challenges – we can achieve transformative change.

When we are driven by hope and purpose, we are able to develop a realistic optimistic perspective and to leverage our strengths and talents in order to help **create solutions and overcome challenges.**

We need to assess reality, look ahead to the horizon – anticipate and plan and do.



# Why Must Connecting Be Our Priority?

# In the Spotlight

**CHAD PETERS**



**“Coaching is everywhere around us, all the time – in life, people, examples and challenges. Coaching and learning can never be separated.”**

*~Kevin Cashman*

# A Crisis is Brewing

And now, in February of 2022, the pandemic, which has dragged on for a lifetime, has accelerated a **mental health crisis for young people across the nation.**

Students struggle with stress, anxiety, and depression as COVID put a dent in their expectations and dreams, and that has made it even more difficult to cope resulting in a lack of motivation, loneliness and feeling of being burned out.

A survey conducted by the *Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research* found that a higher proportion of Americans between the ages of 13 and 24, often referred to as Generation Z, say the pandemic made their education, career goals, and social lives more difficult – with uncertainty about the pandemic and fear of infection among the top sources of stress.

# The Implications of the Pandemic on Mental Health

Depression and anxiety were prevalent six months into the pandemic and well beyond the initial lockdown periods:

- 2 in 10 Americans reported that they **frequently** suffered from anxiety, depression, or irritability.
- 5 in 10 Americans report they **sometimes** suffer from anxiety, depression, or irritability.
- 17% percent rate their own mental health as poor.

# The Pandemic Continues to Impact Student Mental Health

The inability of Gen Z'ers to see friends, participate in sports, and go out during COVID – led to an increased sense of loneliness and isolation. While adults also experienced similar feelings, for Gen Z, it was more significant since they were all in a development period where friendships are key; and socializing is essential to their identity and promotes emotional health among college students.

Data released in January 2022 captures a picture of how the pandemic is impacting students ages 18 to 29 at two-year and four-year institutions (57% of respondents attached public colleges or universities):

- **51%** of students indicate they are experiencing stress/anxiety due to the pandemic.
- **88%** of students feel like there is a mental health crisis on their campus.
- **48%** of students said they want more remote health and well-being support in the form of student health or mental health services.

## Gen Z students found their college experience during the crisis largely inadequate and lacking the community they were promised as prospective students.

- ✓ Students and families began to question the value of paying in-person prices for what has often described as “glorified Skype”
- ✓ Top Hat Survey – of 3,000 students in US and Canada – reported that nearly 80% of respondents said their online courses lacked the engagement of in-person classes.
- ✓ In an age of instantaneous communication and feedback, surrounded by Amazon 1-click, Netflix preferences, Instagram likes, and Google answers – lack of in-person is dramatic.
- ✓ Gen Z students want campuses with fewer redundancies and less friction at every interaction.

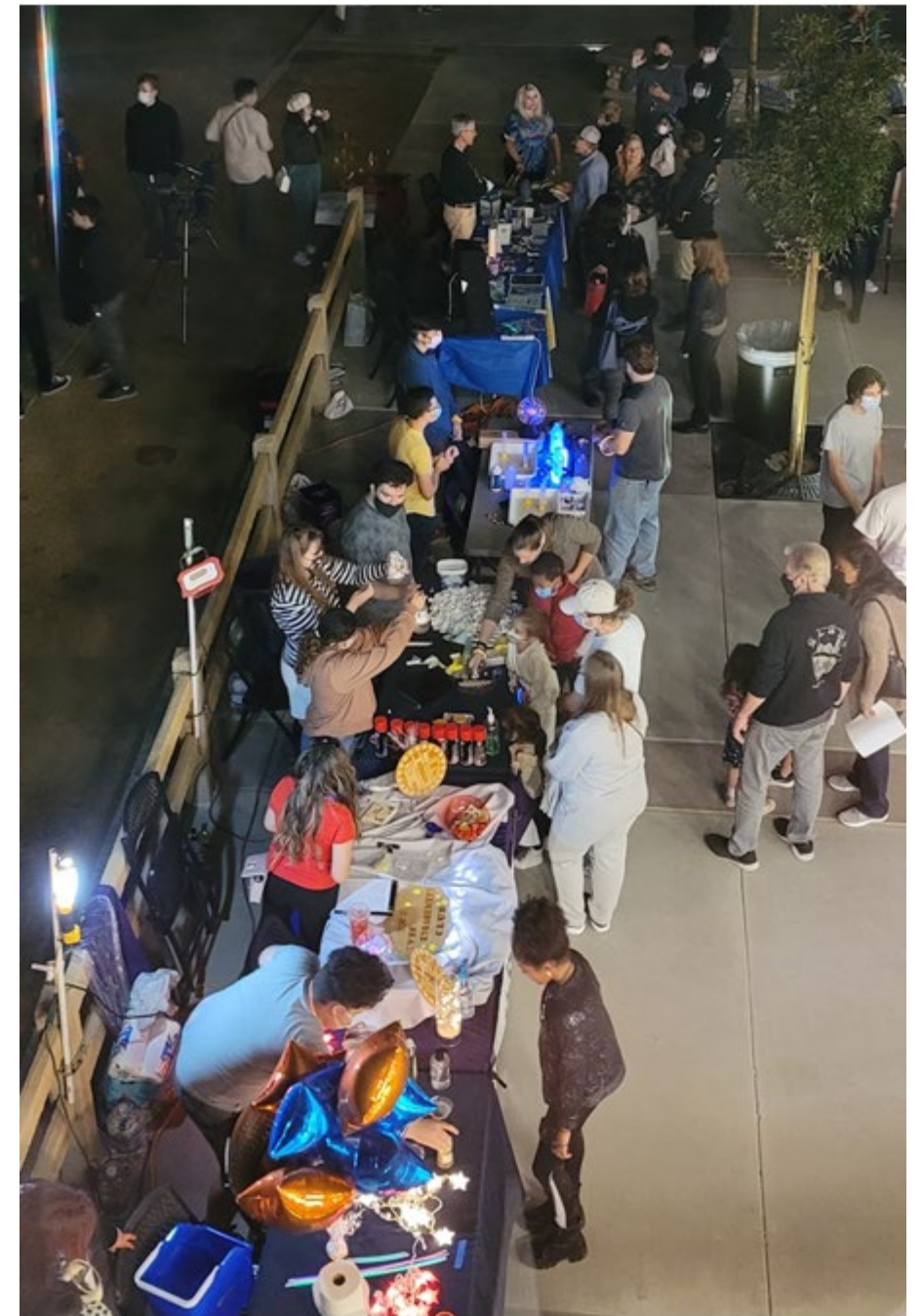
# What is now most important to students?

- **82%** valued safety, well-being, and inclusion as more important than academic standards.
- **72%** indicate colleges need to be doing more for the well-being of students.
- **40%** said it's very hard to find info about campus safety, well-being, and inclusion efforts



# What Can Colleges Do?

- Make relationships central to the student experience
- Create and promote more social events
- Engage everyone at the college to provide support to the students
- Prioritize belonging and purpose:
  - ✓ Students need to know where they can “fit in”. That means having environments inside and outside classrooms where students are comfortable speaking up, asking for help, and learning from their mistakes.
  - ✓ Colleges will need to help students understand the purpose of the college by making better connections between what they are learning in the moment and how they will use that learning after graduation or moving on.



# Be Candid About What to Expect

- Gen Z is incredibly savvy and technology has empowered them to find information on the fly.
- We must be forthright with information that matters most to students.
- Campus safety matters
- Go beyond statements and show what actions you have taken.



# Stand for Something Outside of Higher Education

- Students see themselves as agents of change.
- COC must differentiate itself somehow to market what students crave and want to be part of - racial justice, climate change, and social mobility.



# In the Spotlight

LISA MALLEY & STEPHANIE  
MEREDITH-ANTHROPOLOGY

# Match the Marketing to Your Actions

- Match your story with what prospective students experience while engaging with the students.
- Develop a shared commitment to a brand and a mission: where there are any disconnects, and eliminate gaps.

# Focus on Emerging Careers to Cultivate Student Demand

- Even before the pandemic, GEN Z students wanted to go to college to **get a Job!**
- The time is ripe for colleges to reverse the enrollment declines of the pandemic and cultivate greater demand by building new degrees, offering different kinds of credentials, and establishing complementary advising services that can get students into careers.
- Healthcare, biotech, Cybersecurity, and infrastructure.

# Think About 30 Years - Not Just Four

- Upskilling and reskilling throughout life
- Maintaining the lifelong educational needs
- Business are looking to update their employees and move people into careers



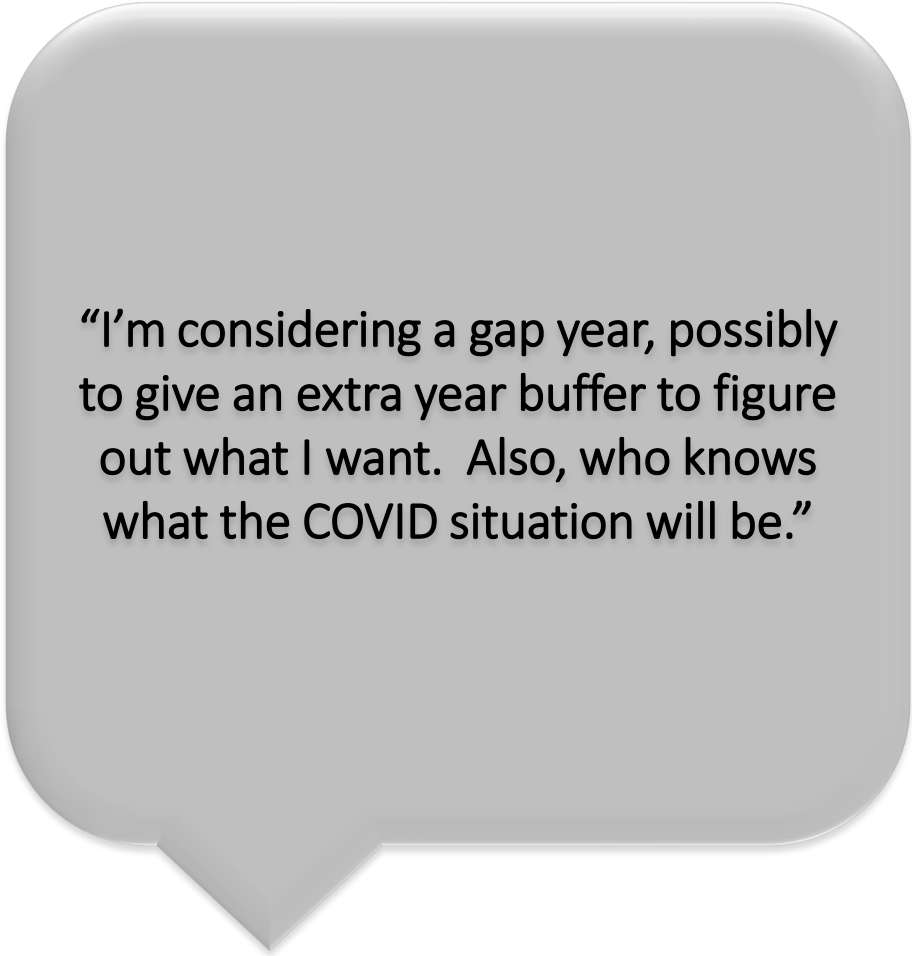
# Continue to Invest in Student Engagement in the Classroom

- Better integration of technology and academics
- Pre-recorded lectures as homework: use of in-class time for F2F discussions and group work
- Students want the faculty to teach – class enrollment is not just about getting a grade
  - ✓ Flexibility with deadlines
  - ✓ Eliminating grades for class participation

# Plans for College Have Changed

Those who were 4-year college bound

- Many are now going to a community college
- Some are taking a “gap” year
- Some have developed other plans



“I’m considering a gap year, possibly to give an extra year buffer to figure out what I want. Also, who knows what the COVID situation will be.”

# Physical and Mental Health Have Been Affected

- Almost every student surveyed talked about being stressed
- Students care about how colleges support their emotional health during the pandemic
- Students care about vaccination requirements





# What do they need from us?

Provide support for meaningful connections.

- Carve out space and time for meaningful connections.
- Foster and support more interaction.
- Dedicate more time to class discussions for students to connect with one another.
- Create more project-based learning that encourages and enables students to work together.



**Let's hear about a project in the works!**

# In the Spotlight

**BRITTANY APPLIN**

# What do they need from us?

- Create opportunities for students to meet up face-to-face
  - ✓ Support students to create their own relationships
  - ✓ Formalize and sponsor events for students.
  - ✓ Provide space for organic gatherings



# What do they need from us?

## Mental Health

- Added support for faculty and staff
- Formal counseling
- Outreach for faculty members, coaches, advisors, and mentors will go a long way to fostering a much-needed sense of belonging and cultivating a culture of caring and compassion on campus.

The emotional wellbeing of students is a campus wide responsibility.

“My belief is that whatever gets me on campus in person, I’m going to do.”

# Activity

**Think of a time when you felt fired up at work over the last two years.**

***How can you help your students and colleagues get “fired up”?***



# How Can We Continue to Build Community for Our Students?

- Meet students' basic needs (assistance with housing, food, healthcare, transportation, laptops, textbooks, internet access, etc.)
- Keep students informed using various communication platforms (email, text messages, social media, LMS, and websites)
- Use peer mentors and student leaders to cultivate a sense of community. Student leaders often understand and relate to student experiences better than faculty and staff. Use student leaders to:
  - ✓ Help new and transfer students transition into the college
  - ✓ Lead the charge when it comes to building relationships with different groups of students
  - ✓ Assist with event planning and curriculum writing
  - ✓ Share their insight with college administrators
- Give students ample opportunities to share their experiences and demonstrate they are heard.
- Engage parents and families, providing them with tools and resources to support their students.
- Increase collaboration to ensure that students are at the center of all decisions.
- Demonstrate care and compassion.

# **How Do We Develop Connection Skills and Connect Going Forward?**



# **Breakout Room Activity**

## **Something to Think About**

### **(Questions for Breakout Rooms)**

1. What have you done during the pandemic to capture the interest of students – to invite them in and to cause them to engage?
2. What have learned that is most helpful for your students?  
What do they need most?
3. What structural support do you need?
4. Six months from now, what will you have done to build connections and engage?

# Take the Time to Connect on a Personal Level

When we take the time to get to know one another we connect!

Research has shown that when you get people to talk, they feel more connected to you.

Take the time to connect with people on a personal level:

- Meet up for lunch or coffee
- Be open share from your life outside work or school. Ask questions that are unrelated to work, such as:
  - ✓“Where were you born?”
  - ✓“What are your interests outside work or school?”
  - ✓“What are you looking forward to in the future?”
- In the office, schedule regular social time for people to connect:
  - ✓Occasionally have a group lunch, sit together, and avoid talking about work

# Be Present in Conversations

- When meeting with people, whether in person, by phone, or over a video call, get in the habit of being present and giving them your full attention. Put the technology away.
- Show that you are engaged and interested by asking questions, then asking follow-up questions to clarify.
- Listen carefully, observing facial expressions and body language. We don't remember what we don't hear.
- Don't break the connection by checking your phone, looking around the room, or letting your mind wander.

**Emphasize positives:** People need affirmation and recognition. Look for task strengths and character strengths, which reflect the excellence of their work and affirm these strengths, i.e. “that was outstanding work” or “I appreciate the way you persevered to make that project happen”. It takes time to correct a negative for people to forget it.

**Apologize when you make a mistake:** We all make mistakes but not everyone says they’re sorry. Apologizing is an important step that will help rebuild connection.

**Begin classes or meetings with positive comments:** This boosts energy and creativity. Share your thoughts about what actions need to be done, by whom, and when each action needs to be completed.

**Ask people to share what they think:** Listen and consider the ideas put forth and implement new ideas, giving credit where it’s due.

**Appreciate the truth teller:** Be sure to personally thank people who had the courage to speak up and share a differing point of view.



# Video – The Power of Human Connection

**The power of human connection 1:48**

<https://youtu.be/wcAogtwOpVY>

# In Closing

It's far too easy to keep turning the pages, hoping for a new ending, and reliving yesterday's story – especially when we consider that we're entering the fourth calendar year of COVID. Before long, it will be the COVID Decade, as history books will define it.

Now that we're starting a new year and moving towards the end of this pandemic, we can consider the important lessons we've learned from COVID and focus on how we can move forward together.

We will continue to grow and build and to support each other and our students. These unprecedented times have taught us all that although we are apart, **we are never alone – we are connected!**