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Mindset can make us victor or victim in this pandemic

Around The Web

6-8 minutes

MANILA, Philippines — My recent experience with Covid-19 was certainly far from pleasant. But I was mentally prepared for it, and its clinical course was exactly how I imagined it would take. With God's grace and mercy, it played out just like the movie in my mind.

I've long advocated that Covid-19 is something we should be concerned about, fight and prevent—and not fear. Fear, phobia, paranoia, and panic are the mindsets that nourish Covid-19 and make it thrive.

Observe the countries that have prevailed over this pandemic: New Zealand, Taiwan, and Vietnam, among others. Their mindset is fight, prevent, don't fear.

Now observe the countries that have unwittingly nurtured a mindset of fear and helplessness, and see how badly they are faring. Unfortunately, the Philippines is among them.

A simple mindset determines how a population will behave, act, or react toward the pandemic.

Victor or victim? It's a choice we're free to make, a choice based

on our mindset. We don't even have to decide on the subsequent steps to take, as our mindset predetermines how we will react to the varied situations that will eventually confront us.

The virus has been feeding on our exaggerated fear, which causes us to fumble in decision-making and to fall prey as a society not only to its physical ravages but also to its far-reaching socio-economic, psychological and political consequences.

Once we fear the virus and feel helpless toward it, then we have been defeated before we can even organize ourselves to fight it.



REALITY STARING BACK Public art depicting life upended by the pandemic has increasingly become commonplace, with one of the latest works mounted on a wall in the Eastwood City commercial area in Libis, Quezon City. —RICHARD A. REYES

Overrated

I believe Covid-19 has been overrated. Yes, it's more infectious

and deadly than the seasonal flu. But with a firm resolve to fight and prevent it, we would have realized that even without a vaccine, we can reduce its infectiousness and virulence to a level close to those of the ordinary flu and pneumonia, which actually kill more Filipinos on a yearly basis.

By strictly wearing masks and face shields and observing physical distancing, we can reduce its transmission rate by as much as 97 percent. With other precautions, we can further push the rate to 99 percent.

Those who get infected may be treated with natural drugs that can boost the immune system, and we can improve the clinical course and outcome as well as reduce deaths by some 80 percent.

The bonus: We also reduce prevalent infections and pneumonia, which remain among the top killers in our country.

How much have we overrated Covid-19? Let's look at the statistics. In 2018, based on World Health Organization data, 75,843 Filipinos died due to flu and pneumonia. The number comprised 12.45 percent of the total deaths in 2018, making flu and pneumonia the third leading cause of death in the country in that year.

The figures are not exactly comparable, but just for perspective, for one year since the pandemic breached our borders (up to Feb. 1), 10,807 deaths have been attributed to Covid-19, including Covid pneumonia deaths.

We're sorry for these Covid-19 deaths, but they make up only some 14 percent of the number of Filipinos dying of flu and pneumonia. We have also been advocating vaccination for flu and pneumonia, but we have never imposed lockdowns and

quarantines for these diseases.

We have never cowered in fear that we might get flu or pneumonia. We have never allowed our economy and the national consciousness to be held hostage by any virus causing flu and pneumonia.

Self-fulfilling

Let me emphasize: The concern and resolve for preventing Covid-19 are fully warranted. But the resulting fear, phobia, paranoia, and panic have gone beyond limits and resulted in a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom.

Again, it all boils down to mindset.

One of God's greatest gifts is our mindset—how we, far from being robots, can will things to happen as we believe and want them to. Except for strict adherence to the preventive measures, we could have allowed things to normalize in a calibrated manner after the initial lockdown.

In our messaging, we could have emphasized how doable it is to reduce the transmission, hospitalization, and death rates (and what each of us must do to achieve it), rather than fueled the fear factor and magnified the gloomy outlook.

We could have cut Covid-19 down to size and made everyone realize that it's not as deadly and unpreventable as pictured.

Some may think I'm not in touch with reality and real-world situations and conveniently preaching from the safety and comfort of my home.

I tried to walk my talk about preventing and fighting but never

fearing Covid-19 and went back to my clinic work and other undertakings on the first day these were allowed. I resumed my usual 60-hour workweek, doing three jobs, mostly advocacy-related.

Early last month I came down with highly symptomatic Covid-19 with a relatively high viral load—too high for comfort for a 67-year-old with cardiometabolic issues. But with God’s grace, the fever was gone in six hours; the other symptoms (profound weakness; muscle, nerve, and joint pains; nausea and loss of appetite) gradually dissipated, and I was symptom-free in 48 hours.

My appetite and energy were at my normal levels in 10 days. I resumed attending online meetings, writing, and editing on Day 8; went back to the office on Day 14 as soon as the isolation was completed; and was seeing patients face to face by Day 21.

I had set in my mind how the disease would run its course in the event I got it despite my precautions. I started the treatment regimen I’ve been advocating the instant I suspected I might have Covid-19.

God gifted us with a mindset, such a potent weapon that we can use in times like this pandemic, for or against our benefit.

Unfortunately, we might have been using it against our benefit, making us fumble and drop the ball every now and then.

But it’s never too late. We still have the future of the whole nation ahead of us.

(Dr. Castillo, a cardiologist at Manila Doctors Hospital, writes a weekly column in Inquirer Lifestyle’s Wellness page.—Ed)