

BY **Kate Demet**
Partner, Chief Marketing Officer



Fostering Connections in a Virtual World

In thinking about the topic for this article, my main goal was to strengthen connections—both between our clients and employees and among our employees. After all, most of us haven't seen each other in 3-D since mid-March. So, in late October, I got a group of advisors together for a casual conversation about how things have been going over this surreal year. It allowed a small group of us to get to know each other better and provided some personal interest highlights that we think will resonate with our clients.

Kate Demet: First things first—how are each of you holding up?

Charlie Brey: Things are good now. We built a house in Michigan that was supposed to be ready right when we sold our Chicago condo in March. But with the pandemic, our build had to stop for six weeks. So, we had to move in with my parents for a while, and it was actually wonderful—for them, my wife and me, and our kids. Our son is nine months, and our daughter just turned three, so we've all enjoyed great quality time with them.

Alison Renvyle: I'm doing well, too; all friends and family are healthy. I moved into my own place in March, so it's been so nice to be able to work at home without being distracted by roommates—though I introduced a different distraction when I got a puppy in July. I never

felt like I was home enough to make the commitment, but I have always loved dogs, so it's definitely been a positive change for me. Along with the rest of the Denver team, I am in the office half-time and working from home the rest of the time. It's been great to see people again, and I'm feeling a lot more connected.

Chris Bach: I'd echo a lot of what Charlie said on the family side—my son is three, and my daughter is one. It's been awesome to be at home more than I normally would. And we've been pretty fortunate—my wife and I are both employed, and our nanny has continued to work this entire time, which is obviously really helpful. In Minneapolis, we've been back in the office most days since early June. It's nice to get away from the hectic household sometimes, and just being with the team has been a welcome sense of normalcy. »

Ben Albrecht: Well, the first couple of months were pretty hard given the market chaos amid the initial lockdown. But like others have said, the silver lining is being able to see my kids [six- and three-year old daughters] during the day, have lunch together, or just have them around when I take a break. Sadly, I haven't been able to see my parents or any of my family since Christmas, so that's been tough on all of us. Next week, my dad's finally driving up to see his mom, who's 94 years old, and then stay with us for a couple of days. We're really excited about it.

Mohini McCormick: Things are good now. I had a bad bout with this virus in March, and I'm very grateful to have gotten through that. My whole family has worked through a lot of the residuals there. I've got three seniors, one in college and two in high school. Dealing with the ups and downs of those three and all their missed opportunities has been tough, but everybody's got a great attitude.

Barb Black: My family and I have, fortunately, stayed well through this. They're all in Baltimore, so it's been pretty easy to go back and see them. I've been spending some time in our DC office since it reopened, which is easy because I only live five blocks away. It's actually been a nice option, because my boyfriend and I have both been living and working in our 800-square-foot apartment since March. It put our relationship to the test, but now I think we're probably meant to be. We also got a puppy in July, and he's been a fun addition to the mix. I'm also grateful for all the green space in DC where we can run and hike.

Kate: Several of you already mentioned some silver linings—irreplaceable bonding time with your young kids or the ability to take greater advantage of the outdoors. What else comes to mind for people on this front?

Alison: For me, it's just been a greater appreciation of the little things. I've gotten time back in my days when I'm not commuting, so I'm able to spend that time going for walks or cooking. It's been a welcome change to the routine.

Mohini: It's just been a forced slowdown for our lives, which is a good thing. It makes you realize how much you and your family members were running in different directions before. And it's made my family communicate more—not only because we're spending more time together. We've been more purposeful about checking in with each other about how we're really doing.

Chris: With all this time at home, we've actually gotten really close with our neighbors. It was helped by the fact that the neighborhood was turning over, and a lot of us have young kids. But especially over the summer, it was so great to be outside, close to home, and getting adult social interaction while the kids were playing.

Ben: I think it's given me a renewed appreciation for my colleagues and those relationships. Many of us have been around for 10 or 15 years. You don't realize how much everyone in the firm is a part of your life until you're not seeing them on a day-to-day basis.

Kate: All great observations. Switching gears to some of the challenges—what's been the hardest part about not meeting face-to-face with clients or prospects during this time?

Mohini: I really miss the in-person interaction. We rely a lot on facial expressions and body language, and those things are harder to notice and read on-screen.

Barb: I agree, and it's even worse when you run into challenges with video conferencing. Sometimes, if we're having technology issues, trying to get each other on video gets thrown out the door. And then you end up just having a phone call. So the quality of interaction just isn't as high.

Alison: Totally. In a normal world, outside of in-person meetings, we'd be socializing with our clients—going out to restaurants or going to charity events together. I miss those opportunities to engage with clients on a more casual, personal level.

Kate: I think in the early days, we all had this »

expectation that this distancing thing was going to be a sprint and at some point, we were going to flip the switch and get back to doing things the way we've always done. But the longer this has gone on, the more we've had to get comfortable with the fact that there's not going to be a moment where it feels like things go back to normal. It's going to be a very gradual transition back to the familiarity of how we interact with people and how we spend our free time. With that in mind, what are the things that you're most excited to do again? What do you most miss about normalcy and want to do as soon as you have the chance?

Chris: I just want to go out to eat like normal. It's a good hour and a half out of the house doing something fun. The kids, fortunately, are well-behaved, so we'd eat out a couple times a week, and I definitely miss that.

Ben: Your kids aren't old enough yet, Chris. Just wait.

Chris: I know! That's why I miss going out right now.

Ben: (laughs) I've been going to Canada with my dad and my uncle every year to a remote fishing lodge out in the middle of nowhere, and we had to postpone it twice before finally canceling this year. That's something I want to get back to.

Barb: I can't wait to not wear a mask. That's my number one thing.

Mohini: Yes, and I look forward to getting back to the freedoms that we took for granted—like being able to get together in a big crowd, whether it's a big family gathering, a party with friends, a sporting event, or whatever.

Charlie: I fully agree. I'm looking forward to not having to think about every interaction, not wondering whether people around me are being cautious, not getting a weird look if I don't want to shake hands.

Alison: Exactly. I think this pandemic has created an unnecessary divide between people. It's become so politicized, and people are judging others for how they're living their lives. I can't wait until the pandemic isn't the primary topic of conversation.

Kate: I hear that, Alison. I'm grateful we have established protocol for those working in the office so that those judgment calls don't have the potential to create awkwardness between employees. And of course, I look forward to the day that's no longer needed at all. In the meantime, it was great catching up with all of you! Stay well, everybody. ■

The opinions and analyses expressed in this communication are based on RMB Capital's research and professional experience and are expressed as of the mailing date of this communication. Certain information expressed represents an assessment at a specific point in time and is not intended to be a forecast or guarantee of future results, nor is it intended to speak to any future time periods. RMB Capital makes no warranty or representation, express or implied, nor does RMB Capital accept any liability, with respect to the information and data set forth herein, and RMB Capital specifically disclaims any duty to update any of the information and data contained in this communication. The information and data in this communication do not constitute legal, tax, accounting, investment, or other professional advice. Past performance is not indicative of future results, and there is a risk of loss of all or part of your investment. This information is confidential and may not be reproduced or redistributed to any other party.

Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc., owns the certification marks CFP®, CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™, and federally registered CFP (with flame design) in the United States, which it awards to individuals who successfully complete the CFP Board's initial and ongoing certification requirements.
