

Kurt ([00:05](#)):

Welcome to behavioral grooves. My name is Kurt Nelson.

Tim ([00:08](#)):

...and I'm Tim Houlihan. Given the strange and turbulent times that we're living through, Kurt and I decided to reach out to some of our favorite behavioral science researchers and practitioners to get their take on the novel Coronavirus pandemic that is shaking the world.

Kurt ([00:22](#)):

In these special edition episodes. We'll explore a variety of different aspects of the crisis and our response to each of those aspects. Through a behavioral lens, we know that you may feel overwhelmed by the crisis already. It seems every news story, every social media thread, every phone conversation that we have is focused on some aspect of the pandemic right now.

Kurt ([00:43](#)):

While the news and updated information are essential, we're going to take a different tact. We want to try to understand the science behind our reactions and our behaviors and how science can help us cope and move beyond the current crisis. In each episode, we talk with a different behavioral science expert and get their best thinking on an aspect of the crisis. So sit back, take a deep breath and listen to our special series on behavioral science and the coronavirus pandemic.

Tim ([01:15](#)):

Christian Hunt is the founder of human risk of behavioral science consulting and training firms specializing in the fields of risk compliance, conduct and culture. Before this he was the head of behavioral science at UBS and before that chief operating officer at the Prudential regulation authority, a subsidiary of the bank of England responsible for regulating financial services. He is an expert on risk and how people perceive risk. Most importantly, Christian was featured in episode 86 so welcome back to Behavioral Grooves, Christian!

Christian ([01:47](#)):

woo. And he for having me again, pleasure to be here.

Kurt ([01:50](#)):

Well, it is a crazy time out there in the world with everything going on, but we wanted to get your input on this because you are an expert on risk and how people perceive risk. So help us understand how are people responding to the unique risk that's presented by Covid-19 and the Coronavirus. What's typical about their response and what's, what's different about that response in your opinion?

Christian ([02:17](#)):

So I think we're seeing a heck of a lot of interesting behaviors. So I talk about human risk and we're seeing that in a multitude of different places. So we can see it in terms of the way politicians react. We've had, you know, everything from very, very quick action. We've had people sitting back and, and kind of being reactive. Um, we've seen it in terms of individuals and how they've reacted to the situation. Some people ignoring it are the people doubling down and kind of panic buying of, of, of pieces. And I think, you know, one of the things to remember here is that there will be a reason behind

every single person's decision making. And sometimes, you know, we'll look at it and say, why are they doing that dumb thing? Whereas actually there will be some heretical or, or, or, you know, past experience that's driving them to, to, towards doing that.

Speaker 2 ([03:03](#)):

So I think we've seen some fascinating responses at all levels of people. And, and you know, part of the challenge here is that we don't quite know what we're facing. And so this is not a situation where many people will have experienced something like it. You might have something that you think is analogous, but of course it's just different. And so we're all drawing on different, uh, experiences and influences to help us try and resolve that. So it's very easy to criticize people. I think there are always good reasons why they do things. What role do you think the media is playing in this pandemic? And of course people's perception of the risk because of the media? It's astonishing, isn't it? And I think when we talk about media, we've got social media as well. And what's interesting between the two things is there's always been a, historically there's been a barrier to entry to traditional media, right?

Speaker 2 ([03:49](#)):

You had to have loads of money. You needed a studio, you know, there was, there was a barrier to entry. And of course with social media, now everybody is a commentator. Everybody's an expert. And so I think when we look at those things, there's a host of influences and people are being really got at and influenced by, by range of different factors. And I'd look, I think a lot of the stuff that's coming out is incredibly unhelpful. I mean, I have seen so many bits of advice as to what you should do that when you think about it for two seconds is just clearly dumb. Um, you know, this Gog with salt water is my favorite one where you sort of think, you know, this is okay. It comes through social media. If you go go solar, you're going to be okay. And, and you sort of think governments would be T if that was, if it were that simple, you know, governments would have told us that and they will be curing this thing.

Speaker 2 ([04:31](#)):

And yet what we're seeing is people sharing these, the, these pieces. So I think there's a, there's a blurring of, of, of where information is coming from. People are inundated with it. You can't really escape it. And so I think there's just a challenge there around who you believe. And of course there isn't perfect information out there anyway, right? It's, it's, nobody knows what the solution to this thing is. So everybody is operating on it. If you're a good actor, you're operating on best endeavors to communicate what you know at that point in time. And if you're a bad actor, you'll just, you know, you can take full advantage of this. And we've seen a combination of those things. So I think it's really difficult for people to kind of distill down who they should listen to. And of course there's a general distrust in some way. Your UK for example, the distrust in the political class. So there will be a presumption that they're up to something and the ice possibly shouldn't listen. And so we see interesting responses that reacts to a host of different dynamics there. So I think it's really tough.

Speaker 3 ([05:23](#)):

Yeah, I see the same thing in, in, in the U S again, that political ideology gets in the way of people believing whichever other side. It's really interesting though, you bring up the idea that, you know, we're all so called experts now and, and, and we listened to people because of our past experience with them. Sometimes as the messenger effect, right? Where we, we, uh, trust people, certain people, and we don't trust other people. What's really interesting in this that I've seen is that people that I have trusted, that I respect, uh, sometimes come up with some of those strange gargling saltwater, you know, ideas that

you just go, wait, you are very smart person. I understand you, you know, my favorite was take a cotton swab and put it in Vinny or a Virgin oil and then put it up your nose and, and you know, have olive oil basically up in your nose to protect you from the, I don't know, I go on, some things are just idiotic from that perspective. But the idea that we're all experts and that we all have this opinion on things lends itself into a, again, to your point of, you know, some people ignoring it and some people just going double down on this. Um, is there other aspects that you see from this besides their past history with this? Is there, uh, any personality components? I don't know if you're an expert in that, but I'm just wondering if people respond differently from that person.

Speaker 2 ([06:51](#)):

Yeah. Look, I think one of the, one of the really interesting examples that we saw here, there's guy called Juergen Klopp who is the manager of Liverpool football club. It's one of the very successful European teams. And he was interviewed, you know, standard interview. This was when they were still playing sport. He was interviewed there, asked about the coronavirus and he, he went into a very interesting riff about why the hell are you asking me, right? I am not a medical expert. I have no, my opinion is worth no more than yours. And he spoke in very, very clear terms. Again, we should not be listening to be, in my opinion, is worthless in this matter because I don't know what I'm talking about now. He is German. Uh, so it stood out massively in the UK, but I thought it was a lovely example of somebody turning this thing rounding.

Speaker 2 ([07:29](#)):

And why is it, you know, why is it of relevance? What I think and, and we tend to take a lot of cues from messengers. Um, you know, they're good at one thing, so we'll, we'll assume they know about other things. We used to listening to them or we respect them. And sometimes that can be incredibly powerful. You know, sports people can making massive difference in terms of the tone that they set in, in things that have nothing to do with sport. Um, but I think there is this, this tendency to sort of, we, you know, we, we, we, we are used to listening to people for certain things. So we'll listen to, we trust them in one environment, so we'll trust them in another. And of course we were also, it depends on how, you know, how much you hear their voice. If we are constantly hearing people, we get used to hearing to it, you know, we'll, we'll, we'll, we'll probably pay more attention to what they're, what they're saying.

Speaker 2 ([08:12](#)):

They're not all equally, we might've decided someone's a complete idiot. And you see this particularly in the political divide and we ignore them. You know, anything they say must be dumb. So fundamental attribution error, uh, is we make presumptions about every single thing they say. And we, we, we, we sort of stereotype them. So I think there's lots of, um, interesting dynamics, but it's a really good book out by the way, called messengers that looks at precisely this point. And why do you know, why do we listen to certain people? And it looks at the rationale for that, that, that piece that I recommend to people, particularly if you're, if you're trying to work out why the hell you are being influenced by people. And of course let's not kid ourselves that we're not influenced. We all are. So I think it's a really good idea to start questions saying, why am I listening to that individual and, and is there perhaps someone better I could listen to?

Speaker 2 ([08:52](#)):

We are going to just double on the messengers because we loved the book and we got to talk to Steve Martin and Joe Marks and had a wonderful conversation with them and we're going to absolutely promote the daylights out of that. So thank you for the plug on that Christian. So, but in your opinion, are we overhyping the risk or are we not taking it seriously enough? I, I genuinely worry that we are not taking it seriously enough. I mean, you know, you, you look at what you see going on in the news and you've got people in, you know, spring breaking Cancun is a lovely example of, you know, and, and you've got people holding kind of Corona parties waiting for the shutdown, doing precisely the thing that's really bad. And so there's a, I think there's a blindness there. Um, and, and, and look, this is an interesting one that requires all of us to do the right thing.

Speaker 2 ([09:39](#)):

And, and so you individually might not be, and you might not even know whether you're a carrier or not, but we need to act society. And I think he's bringing out some interesting dynamics where there's a lot of selfishness on display and we see that in the panic buying that's going on. And you know, people, why the heck are people buying toilet rolls? I mean, that's it. You know, that's a whole discussion we can come onto. But you know, you look at that people panic going those things cause they want a sense of control. You've got other people kind of obliviously wondering but that, but then you know, a lot of people turning around and saying, well look, if I, if, if, if the government is allowing things to happen, then it must be okay. And we've seen that here in the UK where we've been told to stay away from bars, from clubs, from restaurants and there's a lot of people going, well, if it's really that bad, they would ban it.

Speaker 2 ([10:21](#)):

And so you, you kind of outsource your thinking to someone else and if that's someone else hasn't stopped you from doing something, presume you, they're experts. They know what's going on. If it was really bad, they stop us and we'll just keep going until they do. And there's been some lovely examples of sort of blind compliance, um, particularly in, in, in Germany where they introduced a limit of a thousand people. So you couldn't hold an event with more than a thousand people. There was a concert hall that literally interpreted that in a very Germanic way, which was we will let 999 visitors in and we will then shut the door because then we will be compliant. Right now. That is not what the law is intended. Yeah. They interpreted that and it's entirely predictable that they didn't separate it that way because in that culture, you genuinely, you know, it's really important that you do what you're told and you said, so they were sticking to the thing.

Speaker 2 ([11:09](#)):

But of course the risk in terms of the forest doesn't suddenly change whether you've got 999 people in a room or eight thousands really bad. 999 year. Okay. And so what I think is interesting about that was it was a, an authorities attempt to codify an unknown risk and the, the, the ended up with a really poor outcome. And, and yeah, I think that was entirely predictable. And as we look to the way that our authorities and governments are trying to control behavior, you've got a heck of a lot of people, uh, you know, abdicating responsibility, pointing to someone else and letting someone else take that decision. So, you know, I've seen businesses who have continued UFC even they've even been ethics events, right? That have tried to continue throughout this period when we've been told go to organize events, you're running an ethics event, you're still going ahead with it. Now eventually these things get canceled. But I think a lot of people are, don't know what to do themselves or don't want to have to think about it themselves. And they, they, they're avoiding taking a view because somebody else is, you know, they can point to someone else and, and follow that lead.

Speaker 3 ([12:06](#)):

Yeah. Well, we, we interviewed Deborah Small, a professor at Wharton, and she talked about a distorted risk perception, which is this idea that w as humans and, and I'm sure you know this or I'm hoping you, eh, you know, maybe, maybe I'm misspeaking here from my memory, but, uh, she talked about distorted risk perception that people are really not very good at understanding risks. And so they either overblow it or they really undervalue it. And, and I think in this case it is one of those things that people fall, there's a lot of people that fall in the middle, right? And we're probably doing exactly the right thing. But if you look at this as a standard bell curve, there's a lot more people on either of those ends than I had anticipated there would be. I mean, I just did my own social media, um, threads. I, you know, I'm running into people who are just, you know, this is a hoax. This is dismissing this, all of this to people who are going full prepper mode and like a, you know, um, they are hunkering down and, and living in, in their bunker basically without going outside or doing anything. So I don't know if there's factors that play into that, why people fall on either end, if you have any idea of that, would love to hear it.

Speaker 2 ([13:17](#)):

Yeah, look, I, I think it's the, the risk perception point is, is critical. And so if you go back to nine 11 for example, post nine 11, you had a heck of a lot of people who weren't flying is dangerous. So I am going to drive. And so there were a lot more road accidents because people were driving and driving feel safer because you're in control of the vehicle. But actually it's a heck of a lot more dangerous. And you might argue post nine 11 the risks that you're worried about, they have clamped down on, right? So it is probably one of the safest times to fly because they're on full alert for this issue. And so there's a total misjudgment of risk based on a perception of, of, of it. And of course in this particular case it's invisible. Um, you know, it's moving around.

Speaker 2 ([13:59](#)):

It was something that we were told, you know, it sort of was something that was particularly I think in Europe and the U S and, and you know, something was happening elsewhere, wasn't a particular risk. And, and if we look at something like SARS, which was the previous version of, of, of what these viruses they contained, it didn't really impact any of us anywhere else. So when we're looking for visual cues, um, you know, there's a lot of people carrying this virus that don't know they're carrying it. And so, you know, and, and then we've got the stats that we're told that young people are, you know, have been given the impression that they are immune and that may be the case, but of course they can carry on transmitted to older people. So I think there's a hell of a lot of reasons why we're probably not very good at assessing it because the information that we have doesn't tally with our normal way of telling.

Speaker 2 ([14:40](#)):

You know, I can normally tell when I'm ill, when I've got something, when there's a problem and I've been fed all these different pieces of information. So, so what's going into the human algorithm is probably mixed messages, the way the human algorithm then processes it using past experiences and our perception of the people that have told them that is going to produce some weird outcomes. So I think this is a really good example where we cannot expect people on their own to necessarily think about it intelligently. And we've seen examples of people that tested positive. You know there's one guy who refused to go into quarantine and they've now got police cars stationed outside his property to stop him wandering around. I mean that is absurd by any level of the imagination, but you can kind of see the, the, there's always going to be the odd, strange person doing interesting things. But I think we

are just not equipped to deal with this particular kind of risk. So we're bad at it anyway. But I think the dynamics here make it even worse.

Speaker 3 ([15:30](#)):

Yeah. The, the unknown factor, the, the element of this that we are ignorant of a lot of the things that we would typically know. We don't know how long the gestation period, you know, were asymptomatic for up to 14 days. Some people show signs, some people don't. All of this is being learned, we're getting more and more information. But at this point we're still really pretty dark on a lot of the aspects of this, particularly non experts in the field. So how do we go about getting a better assessment of the risk? What are some of the things that we as a people in general, you know, who are not experts in, uh, epidemiology or any of the, you know, the science behind this. What should we do to better assess the risk?

Speaker 2 ([16:15](#)):

So my, my star point is critical thinking I think is absolutely important. And we have seen a, a, a lack of that in many, in many situations in recent years where people have kind of switched off and they've paid attention to, you know, Doris on social media gets, gets given the same kind of credibility as a scientific expert. And so we've gotta be very careful around that. And I think, you know, the, the way that information gets fed to us nowadays isn't through channels where we can necessarily always have faith. So first, the first piece is always to be critical, cynical and challenging. And I think the second thing is, look, we are all going to have to run a form of risk in this piece, which is a presumption that the authorities must know what they are doing. And I think even that, even the most extreme politicians are not going to want to have a situation where there are millions of people.

Speaker 2 ([17:05](#)):

We've in hundreds of thousands of people, you know, who are suffering Bally's results, they're going to want to try to do the right thing. They might come at it like, so I think we have to kind of rely on official authorities. We have to rely on experts and we have to pay attention. And one of the things I think is fascinating about this particular scenario is a lot of stuff that they're asking us to do is really simple, right? Wash your hands more frequently, avoid hanging out with people, don't touch your face on all those sorts of things. And I think, I think when we look at that bit and say to ourselves that that's relatively easy to do, so we should just do that. It's not particular, it's like it's not fun to not be able to go out, but it's not particularly difficult. So I would look at things and say, even if you don't, even if you think this is overblown, why not do those really simple things because better safe than sorry.

Speaker 2 ([17:48](#)):

And we can follow those particular pieces, but, but if it starts to get more interesting with some of the things they're asking us to do, maybe we should be thinking a bit more critically about it. But I would just say to people, pause and think, and I, you know, I had literally, and she's going to hate me for mentioned this, but my mom sent me something this morning and said, I've just been forwarded this. It's useful medical advice. And, and I just fact checked it. It was a a long time, I think a long WhatsApp message. I just fact checked it. I went, right, let's have a look. It mentions names, it mentions things you should do, a little bit of Googling. And you get to a website that says, watch out. Here's some nonsense that's circulating on social media. So I went back to my mom and I said, I said, you should, you know, be a bit more critical of stuff that comes through.

Speaker 2 ([18:26](#)):

And she turned around to me. She goes, I hate the way all this, this faking wise, all this fake news percolating and spreading. And I kind of went, well, just look at what you've just done, right? You've just unthinkingly transmitted it. So I think, I think there's a really interesting piece around the viral which, which is sort of neatly fits the Mattingly, which is we are, we are not only are we capable of spreading the actual virus, but we're capable of spreading a kind of, you know, faking you is virus around is we just share these things and share information and it gets lost in translation a little bit. So I think we're all responsible to a certain extent or saying let's filter what we, what we receive and let's filter what we're sharing. And I've had to stop myself, uh, tweeting a few things where there was a, there was some ridiculous thing about some drunk elephants.

Speaker 2 ([19:09](#)):

So somebody said, well, humans are isolating. Here are some elephants that have broken into somewhere and got drunk, right? And there were pictures of elephants kind of falling asleep in amongst the T things. Beautiful picture, really fun. And I was like, I'm just going to check that. And I went and Googled. It. Turns out it's from years back. It's nothing to do with the coats and entertaining picture, but nothing to do with the current situation. Silly example, but I was just literally on the cusp of, of, of sharing. And I think one of the things that we're going to, we're going to really need to watch is that as we are isolating, we're going to be using technology much more and we're going to be sharing things through social media, through text and whatever. And so our ability to filter that stuff gets much more challenged because I'm, you know, I talked to you guys, I trust you guys.

Speaker 2 ([19:47](#)):

If it comes in from you, my guard is down. And that's the other thing. I think we can all do something. We can protect ourselves from the actual virus, but we can protect ourselves from the kind of fake news, unhelpful information, viruses. Well, you've mentioned a couple of things here, authority and uh, and messenger a lot here, Christian, uh, when it comes to avoiding these fake issues, right? The, the fake news parts of it. But here's my question. How much are those two things, authority and the messenger where I'm getting the message from, how much are they impacting my perception of risk? Oh, hugely. Right? Because if you, if you, so if you look at the way cognitive biases operate, right, we have those and, and they fulfill a very, very sensible function. And you know, and you guys have done this, this, this, you know, hundreds of times where you looked at it and gone, cognitive biases can be useful as well as awful, right?

Speaker 2 ([20:37](#)):

And they serve a purpose, which is we cut down the volume of information that our brains would otherwise have to process or there's an evolutionary benefit to it. And we can all think of examples where cognitive biases and heuristics work fabulously well. And I think, you know, one of the sort of Horace sticks that we have historically used is we sort of look at and say, well, we, we need to get our advice from somewhere. So we will use certain criteria to make a judgment call about what, where that comes from. And of course now some of the other parts of those eristics are breaking down in terms of where information flows and how it comes to us. And so the things that we might have used for face to face engagement, you know we would go to a town hall and listen to the mayor or the authority figures talk to us in disco or you go to the leaders of the tribe would talk.

Speaker 2 ([21:21](#)):



And of course those leaders or tribe had wisdom because they were voted in as leaders and saunas. And of course now that's all being destroyed cause everything comes through the same screen. So we're cutting out some of those sort of filters that we might ordinarily have had. And I think there's something interesting as well around some of the dynamics that are playing out, which is experience in the 21st century doesn't necessarily equip you to be able to think about all the issues. So if I look at, some of the organizations have this where they say, you know, senior people know best and that's correct. In an in a world that isn't changing, right? If nothing has changed, having been around for a longer period of time gives you a greater level of expertise in the same way that it would have done centuries ago. Where if you had outrun the animals on the Savanna, you clearly knew something about survival in that environment and you are worth listening to I think in the 21st century.

Speaker 2 ([22:08](#)):

Take a CEO who's been in their company for 30 years, what do they know about social media, about reputational risk, about ethical issues in the 21st century, possibly less in some instances than the graduate that's just joined the company who will have a different perspective. And I think that's a really interesting example now where, um, yeah, some of these traditional mechanisms that we've used of trusting leaders and trusted people have been eroded slightly. Now. I think ultimately, uh, you know, when we look at medical issues, clearly expertise is incredibly valuable and I, I wouldn't ever want to say, but it's worth asking the question and saying just because somebody has doctor and with apologies to the doctor that is on this particular, you know, just because somebody has that title, right, doesn't make them an expert in all matters and doesn't necessarily mean that there are, we should, we should fact check. But you would like to think that kind of heads of government bodies have been appointed on the base of mirror. And we have to rely on that a little bit.

Speaker 3 ([23:03](#)):

I will go deeper on that on the doctor piece because one of the things that I have come to realize in this is that doctors specialize, so they specialize in cancer or they specialize in pediatrics. So they specialize in uh, various different things. And so yes, granted they have a, a base of medical knowledge that is probably greater than yours or mine, but that does not mean that they are experts in, uh, you know, an epidemic viral disease and how it spreads and the impact that it has. And because they have a, uh, expertise that is in a particular area that they've gone in for a deep dive, typically, you know, extrapolating that out

Speaker 4 ([23:46](#)):

into other areas, sometimes it's really hard and they do it and you know, all experts actually do this. You know, we get, we get a deep dive and we are now seen as an expert and so we can spread that news out to everything. Going back to your initial comment about the, uh, German coach who, look, I'm not an expert on this. You shouldn't be asking me on this. So I think that's a really interesting thing. The other thing I want to point out from your last comment, and there's some interesting research or polls that have just been done in the United States. So going back to believing that political leader, uh, that you have, uh, if three weeks ago, uh, most, uh, there, there was a point of being said about the difference in people believing how difficult their this virus was going to be and, and how this crisis was going to point out and the differences between democratic and Republicans wasn't that much the, the most recent one.

Speaker 4 ([24:44](#)):



Like, you know, again, the, the Republicans in the United States have a much lower, and I, I don't have the information right in front of me, much lower perception of the overall thing. They think that it's being overblown, hyped up various different pieces versus Democrats within there. And again, I think that's part, listen from the leaders that they have, but it's also part of where we get our news and our information and how they're kind of looking at this. And is there a, uh, agenda that is going on in part of this as well, which is scary in, in my opinion. And I think as you talk about leaders as well, we, we, we have to accept the fact that leaders are human, right? And they're gonna screw up from time to time. And what I think is interesting here is there's been this narrative in recent years about, you know, avoid winners and losers, uh, with a particular emphasis on losers and idiots and, and, and, and, and all those kinds of things.

Speaker 4 ([25:37](#)):

And I think we have to recognize these people are fallible and they'll make mistakes. And I think one of the challenges that tribalized world is you will ignore good stuff coming out of someone's mouth if you don't like them or you don't trust them. Um, you know, if they make a mistake, that's a sign of weakness. And I actually, I think we all screw up. We know this and so, so we should also accept if they are courageous enough to turn around and go, we got that wrong. We shouldn't hammer them. We should go. I thank you for changing your mind because it's really, really easy just to plow down a continual path and say, you know, just just sort of throw kind of proverbial good money off the bat. And I think there is something interesting going on at the moment where politicians are having to pivot a little bit and move away from a world where when the, when the looking for election they promise certainty we will do this, we will actually win this ink incident in particular. It's demonstrating the world is uncertain. Stuff doesn't move quite the way you want to stay. People don't behave the way you want them to do and you know, the information flow isn't necessarily the way we'd want it to be. And so I think there's something interesting here where we as a, as a population probably have to recognize that fallibility in leaders providing those leaders are willing to admit it. I think he's

Speaker 2 ([26:43](#)):

not a bad thing. I think is a really powerful thing because I don't want people that just go, this is what we're going to do. And I will blindly continue and ignore the fact that my disposal and when the facts change, I don't change my, uh, you know, my, my, my course of direction. So there's something interesting in the way that they have set themselves up, but also how we interpret what they're up to. Christian, how do you think this pandemic will change the future of work? Uh, it's such a great question cause I, part of me goes, you know, there's, there's, there's plenty of evidence that we return back to the way things used to be when things go wrong. So if I look at the financial crisis, something I, you know, no reasonable amount about, to be honest, after the crisis, banks went back to doing many of the things that they were doing before and we still haven't resolved that particular issue.

Speaker 2 ([27:24](#)):

So there's an example of something where you would think a big shock would deliver stuff. What I'm hoping in this case is, I think this is throwing some really interesting dynamics around there. So if we look at, for example, you know, working from home, uh, there's a lot of companies that have been resistant to it. I think it's now been forced on people. So we will develop new ways of working and I'd like to think that we won't necessarily go back and I think that could be really positive. We could get rid of dumb meetings, silly gatherings, stupid kind of processes and structures that this will test out and this will stress test that particular piece. So I think that could be really interesting and fun and hopefully we can challenge some of that orthodoxy. I think it will also teach us a lot more about values in society

because what we're starting to really see is ethics and, and, and those sorts of questions are coming to the fall because people are calling our businesses that are doing bad things.

Speaker 2 ([28:13](#)):

Um, you know, people that are the, the, the, the people that are buying and stockpiling hand sanitizer, right? They are being cooled as people trying to prophecy or out of this situation. So they're being, they're being called evil and bad. And you can see some companies doing some really good things and you can see neighborhoods coming together and think positive. So I think there's a potential that we start to reevaluate what's important. And I think what's really interesting is when you look at critical workers, you know as this thing bites more who is going to be really important, it's actually the lower paid people. It's the know, it's the nurses, it's the Uber drivers. The Uber eats delivers the, the the people driving the trucks that are bringing the PR. So these people that are relatively low pain society and in many cases don't have any cushions, other people we're really depending on now.

Speaker 2 ([28:57](#)):

And I think there's a really interesting kind of political argument that sort of said we've moved in one direction of free market and, and I think there may be rebalancing and things like universal basic income may actually start to play a very different role. So I think there's a, there's a political realignment potentially coming. And I also think about the environment. I think this is fascinating. If you look at the emissions coming out of Italy, you know the way we think about our sustainability of the species in the planet is also changing. I think that'll deliver changes in the way businesses do their do their stuff as well. So I a whole load of things we could, we can end up with very little changing, but I have a funny for you feels really different to me. Yeah, it feels different to me as well, but then I always fall back to, as you mentioned before, we've gone through other big shocks and various different

Speaker 3 ([29:42](#)):

things and we tend to fall back into our old habits, our old ways, old ways of thinking about how we do things, but I'm hopeful. I'm hopeful that there's a good that comes out of this. I hope that that good is that we can change the way that we work, that more people can work from home and telecommute and that we do appreciate those people who are at the core of what is really realizing, wow. Those manufacturing people that are making those a and 95 mass, they're pretty damn important. All right. I mean, they're there, they're doing all these, these wonderful things. And so I think there's that you bring up UBI, which Tim is probably gonna laugh at here because it's a, it's been my bandwagon for, for a couple of years now. And you know, in, in the United States, it's been really interesting because it went from this really sideline thing.

Speaker 3 ([30:34](#)):

It got put into the, the headlines through, you know, one of the politicians here, Andrew Yang, who started to talk about it in democratic primaries, he dropped out. But now they're actually bringing it in as this, Hey, we have to do a UBI while this crisis is going on because all of these people are out of work. We are losing everybody that's in the restaurant and business, you know, airline businesses, et cetera. All of these people who are going to be out of work and as you said, don't have two, three weeks of savings that they can even survive for that long on. So with that, there's, there's I, there's proposals that are going in at this time. When this gets published, it may already be in place. So they might have, you know, you know, squashed it. We don't know. But I think there's some really good insights. They're

saying, let's hope that this changes. Let's hope that it changes people's thinking around a number of aspects and hopefully there's some good that comes out of this in the end.

Speaker 2 ([31:26](#)):

But you know, as you know, it's interesting about that, that that piece is, if you look at many of the drivers of human behavior, it's financially driven, right? So why are people not quarantined? There will be people out there who know they are carrying the virus who are still going to work because they have no financial choice. And so when I look at why are people doing things, there is always going to, you know, there's that great JP Morgan quote, which was, which was sort of, um, you know, there are two reasons why, why men do things. There's a, there's a good reason and the real one. And, and, and I, I've always loved that because I think it's, you know, it's, it's classic explain system one, system two. We kind of do things with our system one thinking and then system two comes up with a good reason why. And I think we need to give people, if we want to look at a lesson from this particular thing, we need to give people all of the opportunities to do the right thing. And I think if you were on the breadline, you're worried about getting thrown out on the street, what are you going to do? The answer is you're going to look after yourself because that is the logical thing to do from a, you know, just just from a sort of a pure preservation perspective. Survival. Yeah. Yeah. So

Speaker 3 ([32:26](#)):

I have one other, one other risk thing that I've been thinking about and I want to get your thoughts on this Christian. So say we actually do a good job say that we're actually successful in down the spread of the coronavirus and the number of people who actually have coven 19 is, is manageable. And that the number of deaths from this is actually pretty low. Obviously there's, there's thousands of those, but you compare it to a normal influenza outbreak. Maybe not as bad as that may be. We've, we've done the right things. Maybe we got lucky, right? And, and we do this. My fear is then the next time that something like this happens, you mentioned the SARS epidemic before, right? Where we had controlled it. Uh, and so people are, are, are looking back at that. So the next one of these, which they come around probably every five years or so is when we look at kind of these viral outbreaks is as far as I can tell that people are going to go, Oh yeah, remember that last one? We over-hyped it and we did all of these things and look at the economic downturn that that had to our wallets. As you said, we're financially driven and yet we didn't have that many deaths. So we are not going to respond that way. Moving forward. And, and I fear that. Is there anything from your perspective that would say if we do do this good, that that might be an outcome in the future or anything else?

Speaker 2 ([33:50](#)):

Yeah, it's a huge look. There are lots of examples where taking big steps to prevent something actually actually has the intended outcome. But people don't see that. Right? So they assume that it's been overkill and they, and, and, and, and you can see this a little bit in terms of the way people responded. So, so one, we've not experienced this thing before, so some people are going, well they're exaggerated cause we've never seen it before, so it can't possibly, the realms of our understanding is that this, this doesn't happen. But the second piece is people go, every time this happens they go crazy and they do stupid stuff and, and, and the, uh, and, and they don't understand that it's because of that crazy stuff that we've saved that that is absolutely a risk. And you see this, you know, there's this, there's this sort of the helmet paradox.

Speaker 2 ([34:30](#)):

We would cycle helmets or seatbelts. Every time you introduce a new safety feature, people kind of or rule people get irritated by it and then they take more risk because they, because they feel more comfortable and feel safer. So I think this is an unfortunate dynamic that's there, but I would argue that's kind of a nicer problem to have than the other way round. Right. Which is what I think that is something that we have to live with and and, and my message to anyone who is trying to influence human behavior is to think about this thing. Because very often what we do is we start from the premise of, of of the people saying this is what we need to have happen. So we will follow a logical path and we don't think about the behavioral piece, which is what does this actually feel like?

Speaker 2 ([35:10](#)):

What is this asking of people? And the bit I really think is important is we need to explain to people afterwards why that helped. Because if you've just been asked to do something and you have no sense of of, of what it, what part you have played, then I think it's very logical to turn around and go, I didn't make any different sorts of, I made no contribution whatsoever. And you know, all of us staying at home, we should, and I've seen this some great campaigns out there saying, you know, please, you know, I'm out there doing stuff for you so can you please stay home for me? We should the health world transmitted that message and we need to continue that kind of thing afterwards. Not that I'm comparing people that are sitting on their backside watching Netflix or home with genuine heroes who are on the front line battling this thing, but we need to recognize, and this, this was done really well, I think after the second world war where people made massive and you compare the sacrifices they made and what we've been asked to do.

Speaker 2 ([35:59](#)):

I mean, you know, heck I, I've got huge respect for my kind of grandmother's generation, but I think we need to be clear afterwards and explain to people how that really helped because we are going to have more of this blindness and particularly there's a long gap between the next one. You know, people memories are short term and I think explaining to people how they helped makes a massive difference. Good examples. Second mobile in the UK as well, you had factory workers, you were making parts for aircraft and one of the things they did to, to boost morale in the factory was they sent a pilot into the factory to explain to them how their part helped his plane fly in that and what he was doing. And so they felt part of this bigger piece. And I think that's a really important thing. If we're all doing small things that feel insignificant that we could ignore if we've done them.

Speaker 2 ([36:41](#)):

We need to be explained what we're doing before and praised afterwards without over-exaggerating how much commitment we've made to them. All right, so I have, I have one last question and Tim, if you have another question that's fine too. But my last question you brought it up earlier is why are people going out and buying toilet paper? What, what, why? Why is toilet paper the, the defacto thing that I need in bulk of for two years to to bring home to my house to protect me from this virus? I mean on the face of it, it's dumb, right? Because because you, if you food would argue with you more input input, it's more important than managing the outputs, right? Let's start with that second base. If you run out of toilet paper, there are alternative propositions, which we don't have to go into now, but we will know how we would manage that particular situation.

Speaker 2 ([37:30](#)):

So, so clearly from a sort of a practical perspective, it's really silly. I can see from an emotional perspective why people might do it because clearly it's a comfort factor. It is something where you would look and go, what, what? Looking around, it takes up a lot of space. And so you would kind of go, what is the one thing I really need to be able to get through this thing when it gets really pun intended, shitty, right? So we want that thing and it's an obvious big visual thing. And I think what happened here was a bit of herd mentality. And this is where social media and the media don't help, right? I go into a store and what is one of the most noticeable things when it's empty on the shelves is the answer is toilet rolls because they are massive. And so you can see visually.

Speaker 2 ([38:09](#)):

So if people start doing this and you know the pictures we've seen, it's been, it's not even people like buying another nine pack. It's like, well my 50 or 60 rolls if not more. And I think that just created this Stampy thing. Well, if everybody else is buying it, social PR, I better be getting in with that game. They know something I don't, and, and focusing on that on, on that particularly. So I think it's a nice visual feeling of being well prepared. I think it is. It is. It's sad. But I look at it and say, I think there's a bit of psychology that's at play here, which is it may well be that that's potentially stopped other things being so people are going to want to panic by some feel like you're doing something. So it's possible that other things were protected that might be harder to produce then with, because people going for that obvious target.

Speaker 2 ([38:52](#)):

And my final little little PCA was, it was in 2008 in the UK we had a, uh, a fuel crisis where the tanker drivers went on strike and the prime minister at the time, Gordon Brown went out on TV and said, there is no needs to go and panic by few or do you know you're laughing. I don't remember getting one idiot. Right. Why is he saying this? Cause what is everybody going to do? They go, my good, he's telling us not to panic, but let's go panic bite. And that's what happened. And they claim that this was a deliberate psychological trick. So he announced this on the Monday, the strike was due to start on the Friday. People would go panic by Monday, Tuesday. They could restock Wednesday, Thursday before the strike actually kicked in. And they claimed that they knew all of this stuff and it was being psychologically managed.

Speaker 2 ([39:33](#)):

So I'm not suggesting that the toilet paper outbreak was something that was, that was preplanned, but I think he's really interesting and as we look to manage these things in future, I think understanding that dynamic, it may well be that we need to, we need to give people a sense of control. So let's let them think. There's something they need to panic. They don't, and we could potentially manage it that way, I think is going to happen in some way, shape or form. But you know, it's, it's really hard and I feel really sorry for elderly people who turn up and they can't even get the basics, you know, that is, it's an incredibly selfish behavior, but, but you can sort of see how people get wrapped up in the moment.

Speaker 3 ([40:07](#)):

No, you bring up a really interesting fact that the fact that we people are going out and hoarding and buying up toilet paper and not doing it with maybe something other than it is essential might've actually helped out in the long run for some, some of those people and some of the things that we actually need. If this does go much longer and much worse than we did

Speaker 2 ([40:29](#)):

and it might be a huge detriment to some of those people who really need it and weren't able to get it. I bought the last package of rice off of the shelf, uh, at my, at my supermarket a couple of days ago. Somebody else was coming in looking for rice. They're up a Creek without a paddle. Yeah. And now we know who to blame, right? Yeah. They don't even have toilet paper for being up there without, without a battle. Come on guys. Crisp way to go. Tim, thank you so much for being on behavioral grooves and sharing your thoughts with us. We always appreciate the conversation. We are grateful for your time and your insight and your thoughts on this. This has been great. Thank you. Thank you so much for having me.

Speaker 5 ([41:14](#)):

[inaudible]

Speaker 3 ([41:14](#)):

welcome to the special edition of our grieving session where Tim and I groove on some of the ideas and concepts that were inspired by our conversation with Christian. Okay, so Tim, what were some of the key takeaways that you took from our conversation with Christian? Let's start with an idea that a lot of people, grace

Speaker 4 ([41:34](#)):

and that is that we're all fallible and let's give each other a little bit of a break. Leaders especially, right, right. I think that was really important when Christian was going on talking about we've made mistakes. Everybody in the leadership component of this has either not anticipated it as well as they should have or has done. Maybe things even opposite of what they should have done and those that come in and say, you know what? I made a mistake. Have that ability to do that. We should. We should appreciate that. That's an important part of it is that Christian made sure that he brought in this idea that humility is a key part of leadership as well. And that the good leaders are willing to say, look, we missed this. We didn't call this as we ought to have and we're correcting it now. And so here's, here's our correction.

Speaker 4 ([42:28](#)):

Well, and too often we political leaders live in this world of fear, right? That any mistake will be glommed on and will be used against them. And so having that, uh, you know, making sure that you never apologize for things that you're always right is, is a key piece of that. But in this time, when lives are on the line, when people's livelihoods are being destroyed, that we need to pull together that this, as we talked with an, um, James Brewer about this, this enemy isn't other people. This enemy is this virus. It isn't another tribe, another country, other, other civilizations. It is re literally just this virus that as leaders, having that humility and the ability to say, look, we didn't do this like we should have. But now we've learned and here's where we're going to go from there. I think as as humans, as, as people, as voters, that would be a really good thing to have grace around and to appreciate and actually to celebrate.

Speaker 4 ([43:40](#)):

So let's come back to Hanlon's razor as well. Let's not attribute to malice that which could easily be explained by stupidity. I live by that rule. I am that rule. I was going to say I live by that rule because most of the mistakes I make, you know, are just because I'm an idiot. You know, most of the time I don't try to be malicious or wrong, but that's it. So yeah, I think there's a really interesting piece of that and I



think, you know, he was talking about leaders, but I think we also need to apply this into those individuals who may have a different perspective of this. Uh, you know, I've railed on this. I've talked to you about this, of just the people that I sit there and go, how can you not see the science? How can you not just look at the just damn numbers of this and be concerned looking at the number of hospital beds that are out there versus if this gets, you know, the infection rate, the [inaudible] rate of this is double what it is for influenza that, you know, you multiply that by the number of people that you have in, in your state, city, country, whatever it is, and you just don't have enough pastoral beds.

Speaker 4 ([44:54](#)):

If they all get sick at this time. And I just, I have to step back. I need to take a moment and have some grace for these people. And we have different moral foundations and we have different personalities, right? We have different personality traits and we're stronger. Each of us are stronger in different things and, and then the next person is. And so those will influence how we respond and the context in which we take this stuff in. Yeah. So I mean, Christian talked about, we all come from different backgrounds. We all have these different historical, uh, elements to look back on that create our mindset. And I think that's really key in this. We all have that different lived experience, but you bring up a really good point. Personality. And this is something I, I have a hypothesis on. Oh, well I, you know, I've done some research with the big five that was actually my dissertation use the big five personality as part of that.

Speaker 4 ([45:49](#)):

So I have some familiarity, but I wouldn't consider myself an expert on this, but I do have a hypothesis that, you know, the way that people are reacting is related to how they score on these personality, uh, characteristics. So specifically, so the, so the big five, the ocean, right? So openness, uh, basically openness to experience, uh, uh, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism. The, the acronym ocean. This is that. And so if you look at those, I, I have this idea that if, you know, again, if you score high on neuroticism, neuroticism as a negative connotation, but it basically means that you're just hyper vigilant over things and you get worried about them, uh, and, and you, you're, you're kind of anxious. Uh, it's a sensitivity to, to, to those, those types of things. And so I think if you score high on the neuroticism scale, you are more likely to be at one of either ends of that bell curve where you have the people who are calling this a hoax, that this is just a made up media driven frenzied aspect that, you know, it's, it's, it's this conspiracy theory and you're more likely to be on that or you're more likely to be on the entire opposite side, which is full prepper mode.

Speaker 4 ([47:18](#)):

Right. And the world is going to die and I'm going to go down in my bunker with my 300 cases of toilet paper and you know, I will survive and my ass will be clean for a long time.

Speaker 4 ([47:34](#)):

And now I, you know, I don't have any, any specific research to back that up. I don't know if that's the case. I also think that if you score lower on neuroticism, you're probably more likely to be in the middle somewhere. I also think that, what about, what about the others? We got, well, you know, I don't, I don't know anything, uh, I, my hypothesis again as agreeableness. Oh, okay. Openness. I don't, I don't know. Right. But agreeableness and conscientiousness, I, I think there's some probably correlational aspects into how people are behaving. So I think, uh, those people that score high on agreeableness and score high in conscientiousness will probably be more likely to follow all of the guidelines and policies and rules. And, and here's my thinking on this as is agreeableness. And actually



I'm going to take a step back. I think they're there, they're going to have the same output behavior, but they're going to be doing it for two separate reasons.

Speaker 4 ([48:34](#)):

Agreeableness is going to be looking at this from the perspective of I am going to do this so that I am not putting others in danger. And it's about, it's an other focused. Yeah. And so, and Christian talked about, Oh, I'm sorry, but Christian talked about like the reasons that we do things is important, right? So, so this could be the reason for someone who's high on agreeableness. It might be the, uh, the support of the community, right? It's the support of the community is making sure that I'm, I'm being there and being, uh, conscious of the, the others that are in my life that I could potentially harm if I did have a, if I was carrying this and spread it to them. And you don't want to be that person that that would be horrible for you. I think people who score high on conscientiousness, which is that idea, you know, we, we, we, we do things and this is, I'm just conscious about everything that conscientious about everything that I do.

Speaker 4 ([49:30](#)):

So I think that that is, they're doing it because these are the guidelines. This is the type of person I am. We follow these rules. This is how it works. So both of them are going to be more compliant to those guidelines and policies than say, uh, people who score lower on those, but they're doing it for different reasons. Now, pure conjecture on my part. It's an educated guess, but it is, it is. And it's a relatively simplistic approach that totally lines up with it. And if we've got experts out there and please, please contact us and educate us because I am not the expert in the five, you know, five big, big five. But uh, yeah, we'd love to love to love to know if I'm right or if I'm partially right or if I'm totally wrong. Cause I will, I will. I will take that and run with it. Only contact us if, if you're gonna support it, if you're going to give a confirmation, Oh, I want to

Speaker 1 ([50:27](#)):

know. I could be wrong. I would love to know if I'm wrong, that wouldn't be a good thing. I would expand my knowledge. That's what, that's what this program is about, Tim. It's about, it's about learning and is exploring and, and getting past our preconceived ideas. Amen brother. The little hypothesis that we make. That's right. All right. What else? What else struck you? What, what, uh, what else was your kind of on our, on our, on a rant here. Just, you should just sound like I'm ranting. I apologize folks. Don't outsource your critical thinking. Yes, yes. I'm so glad you brought that up.

Speaker 4 ([51:03](#)):

Oh my God. What a perfect line and thought for this time because we do it in normal times. But I think in these times of crisis where the crisis is being caused by an unknown entity where we don't have all the information, where it's scary, it is impacting a whole bunch of things. It's much easier for us to outsource our thinking to people that we trust and not to make sure that we are actually doing our own due diligence on what is being put out there and is being said.

Speaker 1 ([51:49](#)):

Yeah, our 40,000 year old brains are much more comfortable with the very simplistic, the black and white with um, well the obvious answer to this is X and or I don't know what that is. So, Oh, I heard someone else say that in my tribe. And so I'm going to go with that. And by, by outsourcing that, by circumventing our own system to thinking our, our own critical thinking, we, we really aren't doing justice to the issues because our world today is significantly more complex than what our brain is easily

established to do. So it takes a little work. It takes some effort, but it is so worth it for us, especially in these situations, to take a little extra time, be critical. The source. Think about, think about John fuse talked about this. If you see something that pops up, pops up that it's really not quite sure about that, check out the source. Look at, look at the messenger, right? Yes. Quality of the measure. Props to Steve and Joe, uh, on their, their wonderful book on, on messengers, but, but dog gone. It take time to just stop and just interrupt yourself and engage your, your critical thinking skills. Well, Christian brought up a great example when he talked about the, the elephants and the idea that he was going to just forward this on. I said, wait, stop. Let's just, yeah. He goes, I can,

Speaker 4 ([53:13](#)):

it would be great for me to, to push that elephant meme out because it's fun and kind of thing, but don't push it out that it's because everybody's self isolating and these elephants got in at this time because that picture was from three, four years ago, and if you seen that picture, it's, it's adorable. It's horrible little picture of these elephants are, I was laying in the vineyards or whatever it is. Amen. I am not going to spread the fake news virus. Okay. I love that part too. Right? He said, you know, we're all concerned about not spreading the virus, the coronavirus, but we're also capable of spreading the fake news virus. Yeah. We have to be diligent about that. Right. It's called viral, you know, news or viral social media things for a reason. It's they named it after a viral infection because your head explodes when you take too much of that crap in.

Speaker 4 ([54:08](#)):

Sorry, I'm gonna start ranting. Oh my gosh, yes. Ramped on man. I got my rent out of me. You get to your aunt out of you. Yeah. I think the, this idea of not outsourcing your critical thinking, to just take that moment to think first off again on any of the information that you get. Who is, who is that source and the idea that just because you have a microphone and a social media platform and maybe you have a lot of followers, that person isn't necessarily an expert. And even as I said, you know, just because you have a doctor or a PhD like myself and granted I, I'm not an expert in these things. I'm, you know, my expertise is in human motivation and behavior and we're trying to put that spin on it here and hopefully we're not trying to miss misguide people with you know, other aspects.

Speaker 4 ([55:01](#)):

But we're, we're trying to enlighten on the aspect that we know, yeah, we're well intentioned, well intentioned, but I think there are lots of people out there that are throwing out advice or ideas with out any type of expertise and they're doing so possibly with really good intentions, but because they don't have that expertise and they have a platform, lots of people are believing them. Sometimes it can be just a, doesn't really matter. Right? You, you gargle with salt water. It's not that big a deal. But if you Gargo, if you people follow that and gargle with salt water and think that that's going to save them and then they go out and actually don't do the things that will protect them from the coronavirus because they believe they're safe, then that causes an issue and then you're actually endangering other people. And so make sure that you understand who you're listening to, what's their expertise? Are they staying within the boundaries of that expertise and are they trying to educate you along those areas where they're knowledgeable or bringing in the experts? They can still educate, right? They can still, uh, uh, highlight, you know, some of these issues but are bringing in experts

Speaker 1 ([56:24](#)):

to bring in the information on those other aspects. So I'm taking away from this. Don't forward memes about pretty or cute elephants. Is that okay? Thank you for listening to the special episode of behavioral groups. We hope that you found it interesting and insightful. If you liked it, please let others know. We think that the topic is important and maybe we can help in educating people about how behavioral science can help us all out in this current craziness that we are going through. Also, please let us know if you have any thoughts or ideas that would be helpful or that we could share. You can reach us through the connect tab on the behavioral group's website@wwwdotbehavioralgrooves.com or through Twitter. I am at T Houlahan and Kurt is at what motivates. We really do love hearing from you and this topic is one that spurs lots of emotions and thought.

Speaker 1 ([57:27](#)):

As part of our mission, we want to expand and inform the community of people who think about positively applying behavioral science to life. One way that happens is through leaving reviews. If you think this podcast is beneficial and should grow, we would really appreciate to leave a review on Apple podcasts or whichever podcast server you use. It only takes a few minutes and goes a long way to boost us in the algorithms that are used to generate search results. Also, please check out the show notes. We are linking to a number of resources, articles, podcasts, newsletters that we've vetted to bring good facts and ideas around coven 19 and the coronavirus, its impact and ways that we can help slow down the spread. There is a lot of information that's being pushed out to everyone each day and we are weeding through it to find good stuff so that you don't have to. We truly appreciate you listening. Now go out and wash your hands

Speaker 6 ([58:36](#)):

[inaudible].