

When the clock struck midnight on January 1, 2020, I doubt that any of us envisioned the way the first six months of the year would unfold. I never dreamed that a world-wide pandemic would bring about quarantines, social distancing and pretty much shut down life as we knew it, nor did I expect that our nation would go through dark days of blatant racism, social unrest and political tension. Would I have suspected I wouldn't see the inside of my office for months, or the campfire circle at Rock Springs would be silent, or that we'd even dream of cancelling a county fair? Absolutely not.

But it's happening, and for a while now I've been pondering the purpose in all this chaos. I can't help but think—what if 2020 happened for a reason?

What if it's just what we needed to make us slow down and examine what's really important? What if it's a lesson in not taking simple things for granted? What if it's an opportunity to take stock in the way we've been doing things and open our eyes to another world of possibilities? What if it's a reminder that the physical and emotional well-being of people is more important than baseball or blue ribbons? What if it's a message that no matter how far we've come in racial equality and respect for differences there's still so much more that needs to be done? What if it's an unprecedented opportunity to grow?

I'm a firm believer in making lemonade when handed lemons, and K-State Research and Extension has opened the biggest lemonade stand in organizational history over the past 4 months. We've been nimble and quick to respond to critical issues. We've facilitated crucial but difficult conversations. We've made years' worth of progress in digital education delivery in a matter of weeks. We've innovated and we've celebrated our wins, big and small.

We didn't accomplish these things without some moments of panic and pain, but discomfort leads to growth. How have you grown over the past few months? How will you continue to grow and develop your skillset in the post-COVID world?

Global organizational change strategists at McKinsey and Company suggest that for employees to respond well to change, a specific set of skills is important. These skills include:

- the ability to operate in a fully digital environment,
- critical thinking and problem-solving skills which allow employees to respond to critical issues with creativity, innovation and top-notch project management skills,
- strong social and emotional skills for effective collaboration and inclusion, and
- adaptability and resilience skills.

ESP members have several opportunities coming up to grow their skillset. Applying for an ESP Program Innovation Grant is a great way to use critical thinking, problem solving, innovation and project-management skills. The [grant applications](#) are due August 15. Past grants have been used for all kinds of innovative programs. Second, the National [ESP Conference](#) is coming up October 5-8 and registration is now open. The national board is in the process of deciding whether this conference will be held in person or virtually, but either way, it's a wonderful opportunity to connect with colleagues from across the nation and grow your skillset. Early-bird registration ends August 15. National ESP's webinar series continues August 25 with *Social Marketing Principles to Increase Behavior Change Among Extension Clients*. Be sure to [register](#) in order to receive the webinar link. Lastly, consider broadening your knowledge and skillset in the area of inclusion by participating in the ESP Urban and Culturally Diverse Audiences Affinity Group. Marlin discusses this in detail in his president-elect report.

While 2020 is nothing like we expected, we'll keep making lemonade as long as lemons come our way.  
In each of those lemons search for your opportunity to grow.

Jennifer Wilson  
Chapter President