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FEATURED

Why we hoard supplies during a crisis like COVID-19

Brett Crossley
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Williamsport — Throngs of people gather in front of the door, waiting for an associate to push the key through the lock. Pushing and shoving for carts ensues, and the worst of people comes out as they attempt to gather supplies from the store.

This isn't a scene from a Black Friday event for electronics. It's a rush to hoard supplies as people's fears boil over into panic as they shuffle through crowds at their local super market. This has become the norm as the battle for essentials and, what some deem essential, is simply a part of life now.

"We've had a lot of control mechanisms taken away from us and (the hording of supplies) gives us a sense of security even though it is false. We're scared of the virus, but there's nothing we can really do other than follow the guidelines." Bucknell professor of psychology Anna Baker said.

Even for Baker, with all the knowledge of a Bucknell professor, it was hard not to feel the small pinch of a panic as she and her family actually started to run low on toilet paper. It was a very real situation everybody faces throughout the course of a month, but with the added fear and hoarding it made even a simple, everyday task that much more complicated for Baker and her family.

Thankfully common sense has prevailed long enough for most, including Baker, to get the essentials required for a prolonged stay at home. Most people have been able to get enough supplies, but what we've seen has been greed on the part of some individuals.

"What's going on here is basically a fear response," Baker said. "We have situation where there's a lot of uncertainty. People don't really have a lot information to really understand what is going on, especially in the beginning when this all started. Uncertainty leads you to feel like you're not in control of things."

As fear grips the individual, it often times mixes with other emotions triggered from the initial reaction. This can lead to even more uncharacteristic behavior. People moved on from toilet paper and started hoarding bread, hand sanitizer, water, and plenty of other items as people in need struggled to get their weekly supply to simply get through.

Information also becomes valuable as people find comfort in common places like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The problem is, people start posting information about stores running out of supplies, which only feeds into the belief we are going to run out.

"You know we all have this cognitive basis and what's salient to us is what we're seeing in the news and what we're seeing in social media," Baker said. "You have a bunch of factors that are working together here where people are scared and don't think they have control of things. They see things through posts with empty toilet paper shelves and you hear about places running out of toilet paper."

The silver-lining to all of this is people's need for community and communication will hopefully be stronger when this finally ends. Walking by people on the street but keep a safe distance form them, wearing a mask, and not being able to touch or see loved ones is something that will hurt all of us. It's a process many will be thankful for when it returns.

"Focusing on helping others and what you can do to be helpful during this situation, because a lot of times when we are feeling out of control and anxious, focusing on other people really helps us," Baker said. "It makes us feel like we are in control and doing something useful. It's really good for our mental health."

There are a number of different ways to get involved from simply helping a neighbor with their yard or groceries, to more complicated and bigger projects like making masks or volunteering to help at the hospital.

We are all in this together and the more we focus on helping others and giving back to the community the safer it will be for everyone. People have been growing apart for a long time and this might be one of the positives to come out of this.

"After different major events it can bring people together," Baker said. "When this is over we're probably going to be so deprived of social contact."

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