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and business are starting to return to the way they used to be. Let's talk about Accounting conferences, for example. With Scaling New Heights 2021 just around ...

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The New Normal: *A hypothetical future-reality that is supposed to be some sort of post-COVID utopia where social distancing has become second nature, and no one wants or needs to work in an office ever again.*

But are we there yet? And, more importantly, do we want to be?

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The Good. *Let's start with the obvious up-sides to attending events live and in-person.*

- 1. Seeing people in 3-D again:** Have you forgotten what your friends look like from the waist down without a tropical island backdrop? It's finally time to get out and interact face to face without the now-routine web conference as our intermediary. This is great for several reasons: we can all forget about the dreaded M-word (mute!), no one will freeze or cut out on us, and we can relearn how to talk one-on-one or to a room full of people instead of a picture of ourselves and that darn tropical island background.
- 2. Maybe you weren't a fan of handshakes and hugs anyway!** The truth is, many of us aren't. I hugged people a lot in the past and I will be refraining going forward... at least for now. Before COVID-19, it was a nearly universal expectation that we would shake hands, hug, or double-cheek-kiss (if you're European – or want to be) upon meeting. This was an awkward situation for many people where they felt pressured to accept unwanted physical contact. No more! COVID-19 has normalized alternative forms of greetings like bumping fists and elbows, as well as the idea of asking before moving in for that hug. Simply put, [COVID safety protocols have opened the door for people to enforce their own boundaries.](#)
- 3. Enhanced cleaning procedures:** Thanks to a newfound interest in hygiene, [hotels are now cleaning](#) the way you wished (or perhaps thought?) they were all along! It might surprise travelers to realize how little cleaning took place in the “before times,” but luckily, conference-goers can now enjoy a cleaner and safer hotel experience.

Now ... The Bad

Of course, conferences post-COVID aren't all rainbows, candy, and ponies. There are still some things to be concerned about, and rightly so. Here are a few that are top of my mind, and some tips on dealing with them.

1. It might still not feel quite safe, and that's OK. While much of the US is at least

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...when you come back to work. Depending on where an event is held, masks may or may not be required for indoor gatherings. Regardless, they are shown to reduce transmission of COVID-19 and other viruses like colds and flus. If you feel better wearing a mask while inside a shared space, it's important to do so and not to be pressured into compromising your safety and comfort just because others aren't doing the same.

3. **Identify your comfort level and communicate it.** If you're going to try going out but still feel hesitant, I suggest thinking about what measures would help you feel more at ease and requesting them from conference leaders. Whether it's more space between attendees in conference rooms or frequent hand sanitizer stations, you may be pleasantly surprised to find the conference is already planning to take the steps you're hoping for – or they may be open to your suggestions!

The Uncertain

Ironically, the “uncertain” aspects of returning to real-life events are the only ones we can count on! These are just a few that come to mind for me.

1. **Making room for people's varying levels of comfort:** Is someone ready to sit down next to you? Shake hands? Hug? Eat a meal with you? These are major unknowns that we never questioned before COVID. The answer is, you won't know unless you ask. Without hard and fast rules, we will all have to navigate these uncertainties as we get back into the world. I recommend making a habit of asking about handshakes and other physical contacts. Show tolerance for others' masks and distance preferences, even if you personally feel differently. Remember, we're still in the middle of a public health crisis, and each person will be trying their best to manage their own risk, so don't take it personally if someone isn't in the same place as you.
2. **Traveling when things could change at any time:** If attending a conference involves air travel and/or staying in a hotel, you may feel uncertain about booking

since things could go downhill and end up in “lockdown” mode again. This is a

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the exact mix is still TBD, the good news is that there is already an abundance of online and virtual communities to complement your real-world venues. A personal favorite is [shameless plug alert] [Roundtable Labs](#). Our Roundtable communities have been going strong since the first one was established in 2015 and many have found it to be a lifeline to their in-person professional community during COVID.

4. Will Manifest be renewed? With so much binge-watching during COVID, this is still something I cannot move from my mental list. But I digress...

Maybe this is “the new normal,” or maybe we’re not quite there yet.

Either way, this is the “normal for now” and we have no choice but to work with it. The past year and a half have presented us with challenges and opportunities we never could have imagined, but most of us have found ways to adapt, and some have even found opportunities arise from the crisis and will come out the other side even stronger.

What has been the toughest part for you about being separated from your community during this New Normal?

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Richard Roppa is the founder of [Quasar Cowboy Consulting](#), where he helps accounting firms and their clients with technology, workflow, engagement process, sales, marketing, and long-term planning.

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