

I Just Have **1** Question

Would You Mind Spelling That for Me?

Part 4 of 4



by Doug Carpenter

It's hard to believe that it's taken four issues to get through all 26 letters in the ABCs of the "New Normal." If you missed any of the first three — which appeared in August, September and October's installments of *I Just Have 1 Question*, they continue to be available on-line through the magazine's website at www.after50news.com.

Twenty-six letters may not seem like a *lot*, but each one of them invariably opened up a unique and intriguing dimension of life in the "New Normal" that begged for

reflection. Frankly, by the time I reached the last letter, I have to admit that I had moved well past any apprehension I may have felt over having had my *old* "normal" replaced by an upstart "new" one over which I had little if any control.

I'm sure it had a lot to do with seeing the humor in them. To be honest, I find anything I can laugh at a whole lot less intimidating. [There. Now you know *another* one of my secrets.] But I don't think there's really any secret to finding a path forward through the "New Normal." You just have to take life one letter at a time and, if you're patient, the answers you're looking for will spell themselves out for you. Anyway, I hope you enjoy the final installment of...

The ABCs of the "New Normal"

Letters T through Z



T
is for
Touchless

In an era when touching screens, keypads and the buttons covering the surfaces of virtually every device we own has become essential to making things happen, the ascendance of "touchless" interaction is an unexpected and conflicting development. If your personal reaction to self-isolating was "No problemo," then the advent of curbside pickup and drones descending to your doorstep from the sky to drop off your latest impulse purchase were probably welcome advances.

If not? Then you're probably also one of those sentimental human contact junkies who used to tear up when you heard the "Reach Out and Touch Someone" jingle play at the end of vintage TV spots for Bell Telephone long distance calling. [That, of course, was a whole *different* kind of "touching" that no one seemed to mind — at least until they got their phone bill.]



U
is for
Unknown

People say it all the time. "Anything can happen." And the thing is, they're probably going to say it *even more* now because — well — it *did*, didn't it? And naturally, you're almost certain the *think* about it more, too. So my advice to you is simple [...and maybe a little weird, as well. Fair warning.]

Don't fear the unknown. In fact, *embrace* it. And remember — even though "you know what" came out of nowhere and turned our world upside down and inside out, the *next* totally unexpected development could just as easily be something *absolutely fantastic* that'll put the "great" back in the "great unknown!"



V
is for
Vinyl

"Everything old is new again," eh? Well, proving that even a cliché *that cliché* is occasionally true, guess what's back. Vinyl records.

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Would You Mind Spelling That for Me?

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After valiantly trying, and it appeared failing, to fight off being driven into permanent obsolescence by — in continuous order — cassettes, eight-track tapes, CDs, MP3s and now wireless streaming services that can pump a virtually-infinite and personalized playlist of your musical faves through all kinds of devices, on command, anywhere you happen to be.

How could scratchable, breakable, need-a-cumbersome-machine-with-a-special-needle-to-play-them records compete with that? Better than anyone expected, it seems. In 2020, sales of old school vinyl “albums” were nearly double that of CDs. And who bought the most? Millennials — who apparently have better taste than we’ve been giving them credit for. So go dig all your prized “platters” out from wherever you packed them away. Unless you got rid of them. [Please tell me you didn’t get rid of them.]



If you think life is going to ease up on alphabetifying language any time soon, dream on. One of the

latest hot abbreves [...that’s “abbreviation” abbreviated, obviously...] is “W.F.H.,” which stands for “Work From Home.” And it appears that even after we’ve put the social distance-necessitated shutdown of the traditional, everyone-under-one-roof workplace behind us, a lot of people will continue availing themselves of the opportunity to sidestep the time, the expense [...not just for gasoline but for pants...] and — for far too many — the annoyance of commuting between their lives and their livelihoods.



Sign here, please. And here. And just one more time... here. Thank you. Whether we’re ready for it or not, it’s officially become a “Direct to Your Door” world. Takeout via Door Dash and Uber Eats, groceries à la Instacart, and [...OK, Bezos, you win...] Amazon Prime for almost anything else you either can’t or don’t want to have to go out and get yourself. You can even buy a car and have it delivered to your driveway or go pick it up from a giant, towering automobile vending machine. [I’m not sure if it requires exact change.]

And pretty much all you now have to do for many transactions is “sign on the dotted line” — which, rather than having to show up at someone’s office and, after flipping though a multi-page docu-

ment [...pretending to read it...], put actual pen to actual paper — you can just go on-line and “sign” virtually. Or if you prefer, you can have your robot assistant do it for you. [Hey, it’s just a matter of time.]



I could’ve begun this litany of letters with something of a sentimental, “B is for Bittersweet” nature. But I chose instead to reserve that emotion for this closing thought about the certain-to-be-irresistible urge to reminisce about “before.” Having unavoidably witnessed recent history’s unexpected and stunning events, nearly all of us will be carried into the “New Normal” by a wave of deeply-felt emotions. But regardless of whether your memories focus on intimate personal loss or fill with compassion for the misfortunes of others, be sure to be equally mindful of the courage and sacrifice without which those days could’ve been so much darker. And be grateful.



I hope you didn’t seriously think our alphabet’s anchor letter, Z, could possibly be for anything other than “Zoom,” which thanks to the

lockdown went almost overnight from being a niche market computer application to being a household word and financial superstar. The economic hardship so many of us experienced during this worldwide crisis notwithstanding, there’s always someone who somehow profits even as the rest of us lose. And this time around, there’s no question that Zoom was in the right place at the right time to be one of them.

They were ideally positioned to respond to the pandemic-driven demand for technology capable of allowing much of the world to function contact-free. They enabled the delivery of critical services like global conferencing and TeleMed on-line health care appointments, and connected homebound employees, their jobs and their coworkers electronically [...even the ones who’d rather have just been left alone.]

And as their reward for delivering this arguably-mixed media blessing unto the worry-weary working masses of the world, Zoom saw its user numbers, revenue and stock value skyrocket, registering growth percentages that at some points climbed as high as 800%. [How do you spell “lucky?” This time, I guess it would be “Z-O-O-M.”]

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Throughout *After 50’s* first 16 years, veteran WNY writer and columnist Doug Carpenter regularly shared his wry generational observations with readers as *Everyboomer*. He has now returned to write a uniquely-named new monthly humor/opinion column called *I Just Have 1 Question* — which he says he’ll ask and then bravely try to answer... without, he fervently hopes, looking excessively foolish in the process. [We wish him luck.]

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