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5 Positive Things SaaS CEOs And Leaders Should Do To Get Through COVID-19

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BY [NICK MEHTA](#)
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Last Friday, as the COVID-19 anxiety was just starting to take over the national conversation in the US, a teammate asked me a simple question: “Have you ever been through something like this?”

My glib retort was, “No—actually this is my first worldwide pandemic. I was pretty young during the 1918 Spanish flu!”

But even as those words were coming out of my mouth, one of my most indelible memories was waking up. I certainly haven’t been through anything like what we’re going through now—a global virus scare on a different scale than either SARS or MERS or anything from the last two decades. But if we’re talking about infectious fear, I do have a very specific memory. And I hesitate to even write about it because I don’t want to overblow anything or make the wrong connotations.

Like many folks who are in their forties or older, I was a young adult when 9/11 happened. I still remember the moment when we learned about the magnitude of the tragedy. Driving my wife to her job as a teacher. Pulled over in our green Toyota Camry to the side of Alma Street in Palo Alto. Listening to the news on AM radio. Bawling our eyes out. Thinking we were under attack across the country. Wondering why the government couldn’t protect us. Later that morning, hearing from the Mayor of New York that we’ve lost “more than any of us can bear.”

Just typing those words brings back tears. But the tears were followed by fear. Would “normal” life ever return? Every plane in the sky (once flights resumed) prompted close visual inspection. “Are they flying toward that building?”

And though it never was the same, especially for those who lost loved ones, eventually life came back—the business trips and the event planning, the small dreams and big hopes, the daily reality and reality TV. Most of it re-emerged.

Obviously, COVID-19 is nothing like 9/11—and I want to be so sensitive in distinguishing the reality of each of them. The coronavirus is an illness. We have [clear guidance](#) from medical professionals on how to react. We have a responsibility to each other to behave responsibly.

In some ways, we know what to do about COVID-19, but we don’t know what to do with our fear. As leaders, whether in business, our families, or our communities, we have a role to play now just as our leaders did in 2001 to help them deal with that fear. And I want to challenge all of us—myself first and foremost—to step up.

Our teammates and colleagues are hearing constantly about what NOT to do. Don't shake hands. Don't attend events. Don't travel. Don't come into work. Don't hire, as [our friends at Sequoia say](#). Don't wear masks. And despite all of that, don't worry.

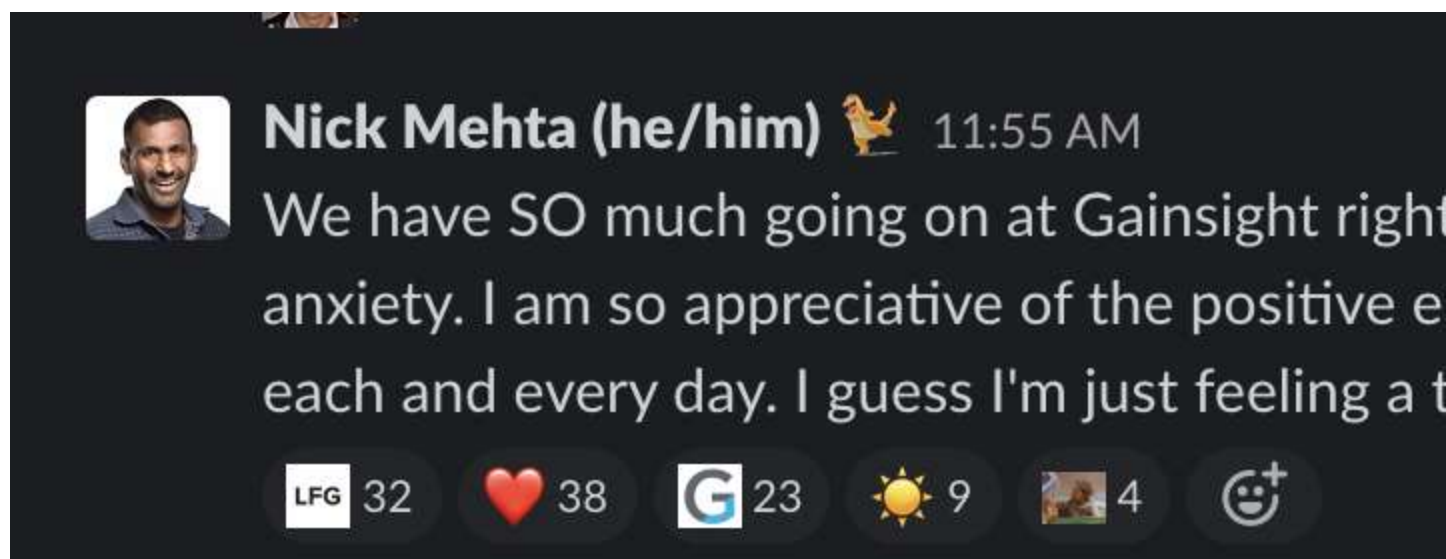
I've learned from 21+ years of working and living through heart-wrenching situations like 9/11, the financial crisis, Sandy Hook, and others, is that people need more their leaders than the "not-to-do's." We need a pathway to take positive action. To make a difference. To reassert some positive control over our universe.

So here are five positive, proactive things I want to challenge you to do, based upon our [five values](#) at Gainsight.

1. Use the “Golden Rule” to show gratitude for your team

There are some things in life that truly have no limit. They can never be exhausted. Being grateful is one such thing. You really do have an endless supply of gratitude—the more you use, the more you replenish! As a leader, now is the time to thank your team and show how much you appreciate them. Send them hand-written notes. Consider thoughtful gifts. Call them to check in. Praise teammates on group calls.

And show your gratitude internally:



And publicly:



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I have so much respect for event planning people. The job involves mind-boggling attention to detail, pressure from all directions and tough tradeoffs. Curveballs abound. And there is always the next event to plan.

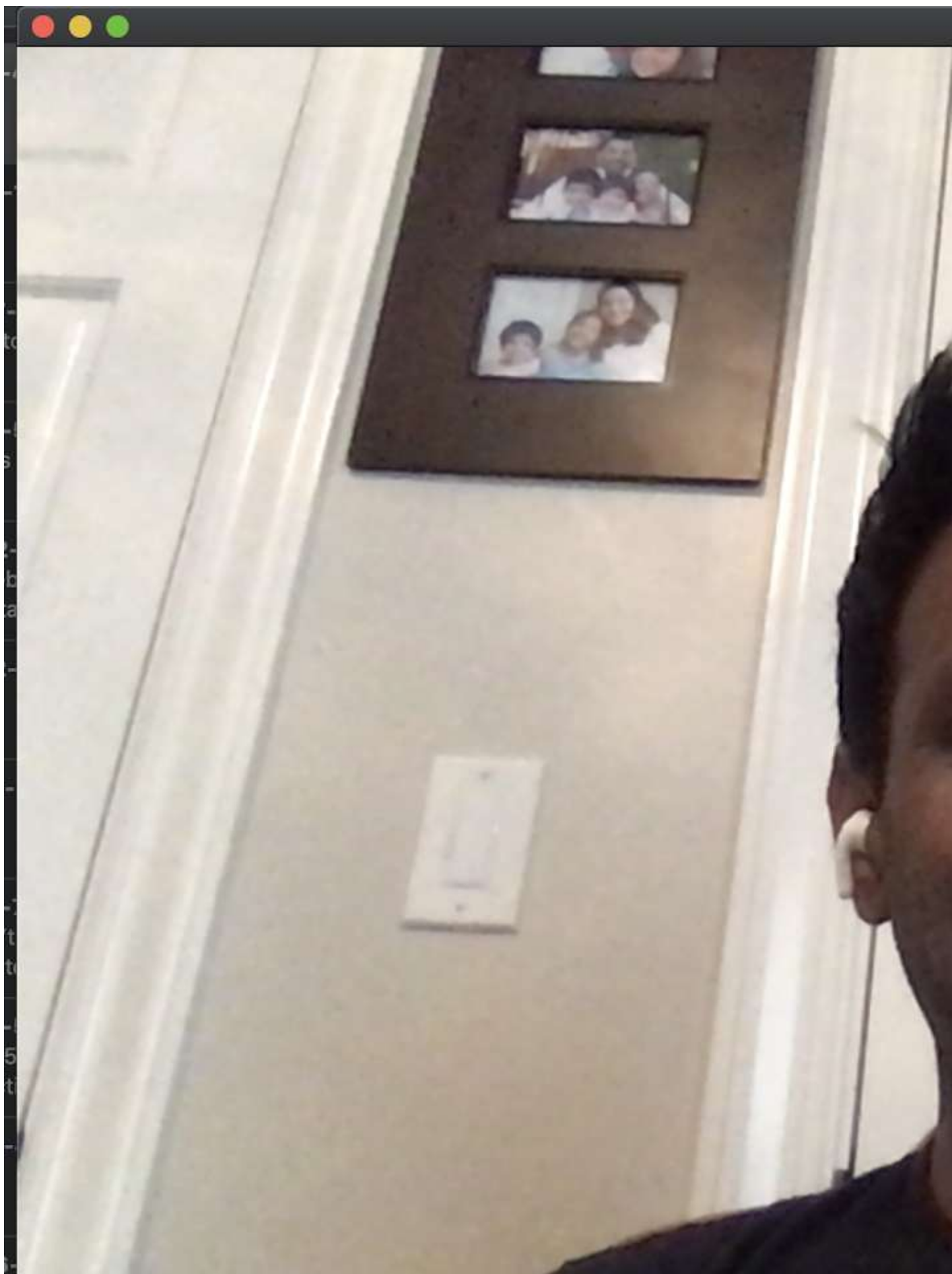
Yet, the best in the job are eerily calm.

141
[5:16 PM - Mar 1, 2020](#)
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2. “Stay Thirsty” to show your team the business moves on

You need to be present now, more than ever. Even if you're remote from your team, find ways to show that you are as fired up as ever. Post to your internal Slack (or whatever your comms system is) frequently. Send more emails to the company than ever before. Challenge yourself to use the extra time in your calendar to [talk to even more clients and prospects](#). And turn on your video so people see you!



3. Channel “Shoshin” (Beginner's Mind) to find ways to thrive in these tenuous times

This is the time for creativity. How can you make virtual meetings more fun? How can you engage your clients remotely? How can you do your first fully distributed all hands? On that note, learn from companies like [Gitlab](#) who have always worked this way.

4. “Success for All” means customer success has NEVER been more important

From a practical perspective, your new sales are going to slow down. There is no doubt about it, unless you happen to sell into industries where the crisis keeps demand high (if you're a COVID-19 test kit maker, you're probably ok).

Given this premise, in the SaaS business model, nothing is more important than retaining and expanding your clients. So your Customer Success team and their processes should now be center stage. CEOs need to shift their calendars right away to spend more time with their CSMs and with existing clients. Find ways to scale to reach all of your customers. They are your bedrock during times like this.

5. Bring your “Child-like Joy” to balance out the negativity

Twitter and the news are a constant downer right now. And rightfully so, in that the reality really is tough. But if you don't balance that negativity with positive content, healthy relationships, strong support groups, and a dose of childlike joy, you aren't giving yourself or your team a fighting chance against the anxiety. Bring your best smile and energy to every meeting. Find ways to make people laugh. Come up with fun virtual icebreakers (I like asking, “What's your least useful superpower?”) And if you're like me, demonstrate to the company that you have no shame whatsoever:



Nick Mehta

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If you could summarize my personality in one video, it's this one. As someone who is wildly passionate about both [@GainsightHQ](#) and music, it only made sense to end our FY21 Revenue Kickoff—whose theme was "Rise Up"—by rapping the entire song, "My Shot" from the musical, Hamilton.



12

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Conclusion: Your Team Needs You Now



As most of you know, 9/11 happened on a Tuesday. In a conspiracy of calendar coincidence, my little brother's 21st birthday was on Friday 9/15/2001. We had a big trip planned to New York, New York—the one in Vegas—to celebrate.

As the horror and heroism of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday went on, we all wondered if we were going as planned. Flights were grounded so we really didn't have any idea.

Then we heard finally that flights opened back up on Friday and we had a choice to make. Do we go or not? At that point, everyone was scared of everything.

I remember like it was yesterday walking on the Southwest Airlines plane with my brother, wife, family members and friends. We flew on one of the first post-9/11 flights. And I vividly recall the pilot welcoming us and telling us he knew

we were all on pins and needles and that we were going to be okay. When we touched down in the city of sin, we all applauded whole-heartedly.

Our teams need us now to be like those confident, positive, and brave pilots from years ago. We'll all get through this together.