

# The widening empathy gap

We go deeper with customers to discover that people are experiencing the same thing very differently.

## The widening empathy gap

Despite the universal, global impact of COVID-19, everyone is experiencing it differently. Everyone we've been engaging with through Customer, Now understands the severity of the human impact this pandemic is having. And yet, their personal experiences are vary significantly. Some have lost their jobs, most haven't. Some have strengthened their financial situations, most haven't. Many haven't experienced negative physical health impacts, some have. Many have strengthened their relationships with their loved ones, closest to them, but many haven't.

What we're seeing through COVID-19 is an enormous disparity of experiences (especially in the extremes). Where your reality isn't mine...and we are having difficulty seeing the realities of others for the truths their realities represent. As we have spent So. Much. Time. with ourselves, in our small worlds, the worlds of others have become more distant and harder with which to connect.

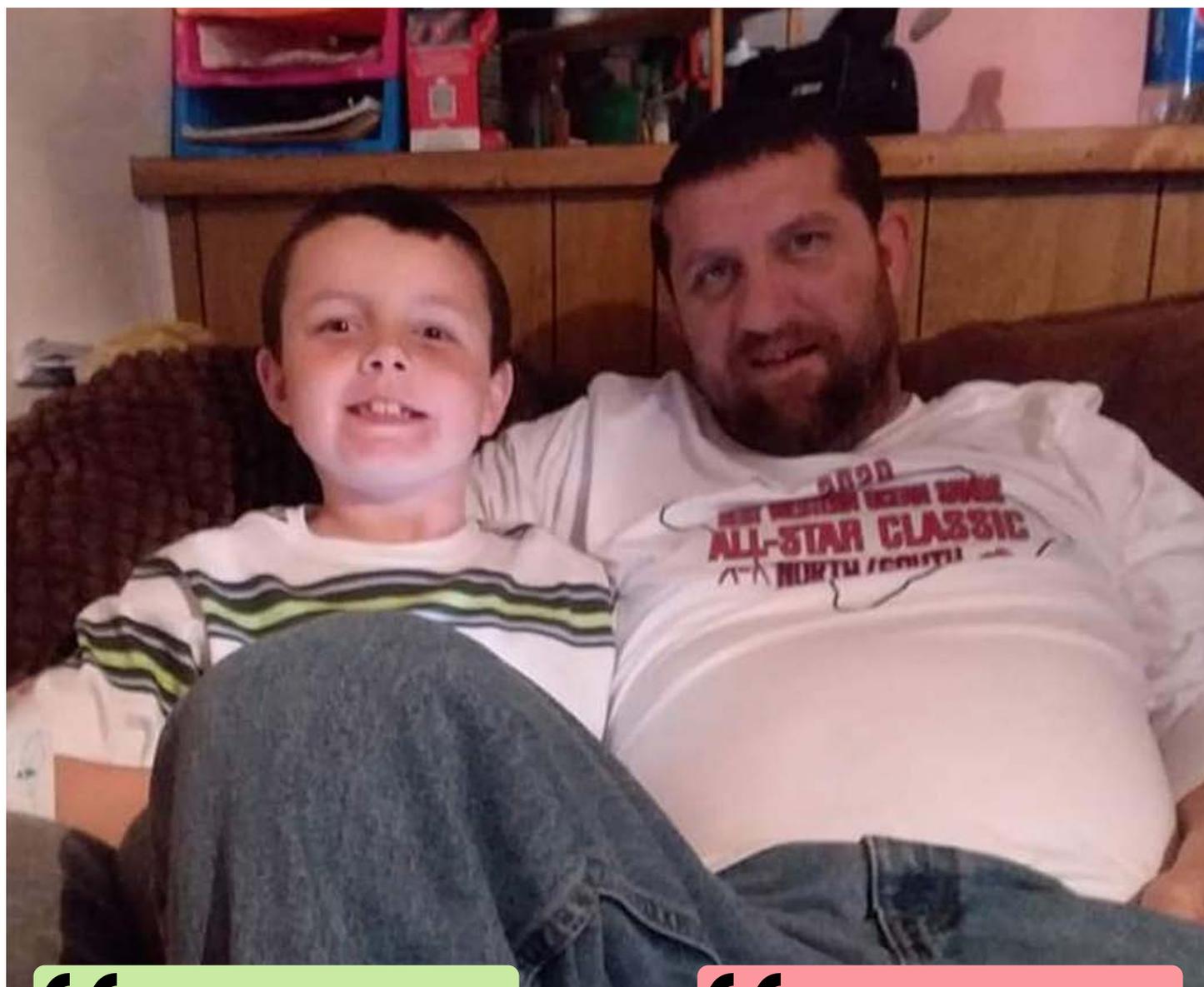
We are seeing an emerging human truth of a widening gap in empathy between people experiencing the same thing, very differently. Where your reality isn't mine and because I'm spending so much time focused on and managing through MY reality, I have less empathy for yours. And so the gap widens...between me and you. My understanding and appreciation for your reality as something different and yet just as real, human and meaningful as my own.

As time draws on, the Claps for Carers aren't as loud. The messages of brands blend together. The next press conference sounds like the previous. Patience wanes, judgement grows, and empathy is harder to come by. And yet, we all have the capacity to change how we connect. To reflect on what others may be experiencing and shift our perspective to theirs. To think beyond ourselves. To understand we may not understand and yet we can connect to how others' are feeling. Because while our realities may be different, we all have experience feeling loss and confusion, growth and uncertainty, hate and love. By connecting through the universality of feelings

## What's next for brands?

Despite the disparity of experiences with COVID-19, there is universality in emotions. This is not to say that everyone feels the same, but everyone knows what feelings feel like. And herein lies the real opportunity for brands: To understand the emotional territory where brands can be most relevant.

## Relationships



“ I have been able to spend more time with my children/hubby. Slowing down and being able to watch my children grow and play has been amazing.”

“ The relationship between the family is much more bonding, we have a lot of time for each other and all are happy with that... since there is no rush we are more calm.”

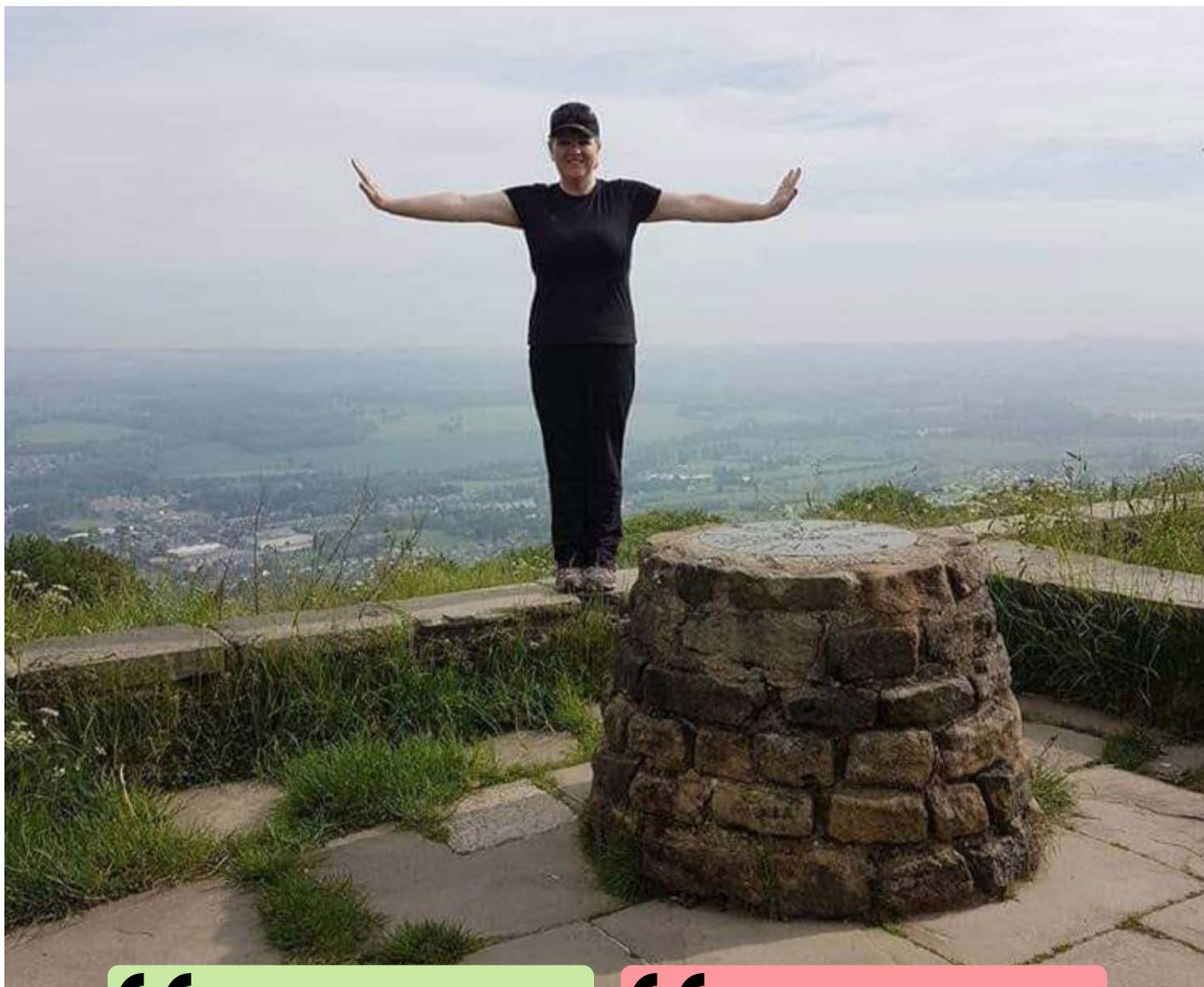
“ Now I look after my spouse and child with much more sincerity and affection.”

“ My family is out of state and don't seem to want to keep in touch. Hubby is off and driving me crazy.”

“ Relationships are distant and becoming shallow.”

“ My husband and daughter and I are getting tired of being cooped up together every day. WE snap at each other.”

## Financial Situations



“ I am still working, but I am no longer driving much, buying train tickets for my commute so overall I am saving money.”

“ No money coming in because I work in a cash job so I can't file for unemployment.”

“ My spending has been restricted to essential because of lockdown.”

“ I've not worked in almost 2 months and my investments have decreased in value.”

“ I received the economic stimulus payment. I am retired and dependent on social security so the stimulus payment was a big plus for me.”

“ I spent all my savings because of this pandemic, couldn't save a penny during this situation. Also it looks like I spend more money during these times”

## Mental and Physical Health



“

The air is more purer due to no pollution, I am able to spend more time in my exercises, I also take a brisk walk in my balcony, I eat healthy, now no junk food.”

“

Physically I'm good since I was eating healthy and doing regular exercise. Mentally I feel very much isolated and lonely. The solitude is suffocating sometimes.”

“

We are spending time together more than before which is good for my mental health. Also I am getting time for doing exercise as working from home which makes me fit.”

“

I am just so scared everyday that something's going to happen to someone I love. I'm not sleeping much anymore and I watch the news all day long, every day.”

“

I get spare time so spend doing yoga, zumba or workout. so keeping my mental physical health good.”

“

I am depressed again and anxious because of our future, and how it effects my family and child.”

# Universal acts of emotional relevance

When we talk to a child, we get down on the floor. If someone is sitting, we sit with them. When someone is standing, we stand with them. We communicate at eye level to better connect with one another. And yet, as marketers, sometimes we forget this first point of human empathy... to meet people where they are. We get so caught up with what the brand wants say, we look past what people need to hear and how they need to hear it. We call this “the empathy gap” that exists between brands and customers. Similar to what we see between people, we see this gap is widening between brands and customers as brands understand less about customers’ realities as the context of COVID-19 constantly changes.

Customers see right through soft piano music and patronizing messages of “in times like these” and “we’re all in this together.” Brands need to get beyond general statements and recognize the difference in people’s realities. This doesn’t mean that brands need to solve for everyone’s realities (we’d be here awhile). In many cases, customers don’t even need brands to make things better, people just want to be acknowledged...that their reality is their truth. That’s not the answer, but it’s a start toward demonstrating genuine empathy.

Despite the disparity of experiences with COVID-19, there is universality in emotions. This is not to say that everyone feels the same, but everyone knows what feelings feel like. And herein lies the real opportunity for brands: To understand the emotional territory where brands can be most relevant.

Emotions provide a universal platform on which to connect with customers. Everyone knows what love feels like. Everyone can see what kindness is. Everyone knows what joy looks like. Or gratitude. Or relief. These are not statements. These are actions. Showing, being, demonstrating, doing. Acts of emotional relevance that are needed “in times like these” more than ever before. This is communicating through actions. Getting down on the floor, meeting people where they are.