

## Keep Your Head Above Water: Quarantine Advice from Partner and Former Navy Submarine Force Officer, Rich McCarty

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Over the past month, we've received a lot of valuable advice from doctors and like professionals on how to manage the stress of quarantine. In light of Lawyer Well-Being Week, today we sought guidance from someone who is uniquely qualified: Winston & Strawn Houston partner Rich McCarty.

Prior to his career as a litigator, Rich was a naval officer serving in the United States Navy's Submarine Force. He served for over twenty years on active duty and in the Navy Reserve, including 17 months spent deployed, and plenty more time at sea, submerged in the silent depths of the ocean.

In a recent interview, Rich provided some valuable advice about how to maintain your physical, mental, and emotional health when exploring the outside world isn't an option.

### **CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF, YOUR TIME AS A NAVAL OFFICER AND HOW YOU CAME TO SERVE ON TWO NUCLEAR SUBMARINES?**

**I GREW UP WANTING TO BE A NAVAL OFFICER. MY FATHER SERVED IN THE NAVY FOR FOUR YEARS, AND I ALWAYS LOVED HEARING STORIES OF HIS EXPERIENCES. GROWING UP, I WAS A BOOKWORM AND READ ALL SORTS OF BOOKS ABOUT THE NAVY. AS A STUDENT AT A JESUIT COLLEGE PREP IN HOUSTON, WHERE ONE GOAL WAS MAKING YOUNG TEENAGERS INTO "MEN FOR OTHERS," I WAS VERY DRAWN TO THE IDEA OF SERVICE—I VERY MUCH WANTED TO SERVE MY NATION AND BE A PART OF SOMETHING MUCH BIGGER THAN ME. COMING OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL, I HAD A NAVY ROTC SCHOLARSHIP, BUT WAS MEDICALLY DISQUALIFIED FOR A CHILDHOOD MEDICAL ISSUE. A FEW YEARS LATER, AS A STUDENT AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY, I APPLIED FOR A DIFFERENT NAVY PROGRAM THAT FOCUSED ON NUCLEAR POWER, WITH TWO OPTIONS—SURFACE WARFARE OR SUBMARINE WARFARE. THIS TIME AROUND, THE NAVY AGREED TO WAIVE MY MEDICAL ISSUE, AND I WAS ON MY WAY, CHOOSING TO SPECIALIZE IN SUBMARINES. I WAS COMMISSIONED AS AN ENSIGN IN THE NAVY THROUGH OFFICER CANDIDATE SCHOOL IN PENSACOLA, FLORIDA. THAT WAS FOLLOWED BY A YEAR OF TRAINING IN NUCLEAR POWER IN ORLANDO, FLORIDA AND CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA. AFTER THREE MONTHS OF**

SUBMARINE SCHOOL, I REPORTED TO MY FIRST SHIP, USS ALEXANDRIA, A FAST-ATTACK SUBMARINE. I SPENT OVER THREE YEARS ON THE ALEX AS A DIVISION OFFICER, AND QUALIFIED IN SUBMARINE WARFARE AFTER A LITTLE LESS THAN A YEAR OF DEDICATED STUDY ON EVERY ASPECT OF THE SHIP, ITS WEAPONS, SUBMARINE TACTICS, AND SUBMARINE OPERATIONS. AFTER TWO YEARS OF SHORE DUTY AND SIX MORE MONTHS OF SUBMARINE SCHOOL, I REPORTED TO USS HYMAN G. RICKOVER, ANOTHER FAST-ATTACK SUBMARINE, WHERE I SERVED AS THE ENGINEER OFFICER (CHIEF ENGINEER) FOR THREE YEARS. IT TRULY WAS A DREAM COME TRUE TO SERVE IN THE SUBMARINE FORCE—ONE I APPRECIATE FOR SO MANY DIFFERENT REASONS. I CHOSE TO LEAVE ACTIVE DUTY, BUT I STUCK WITH IT FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS IN THE NAVY RESERVE AND RETIRED IN 2016.

HOW DOES LIVING ON A SUBMARINE COMPARE TO BEING SELF-ISOLATED OR QUARANTINED?

THERE ARE PLENTY OF THINGS IN COMMON BETWEEN THE TWO EXPERIENCES, ALTHOUGH THESE DAYS, MODERN TECHNOLOGY DOES A GREAT JOB OF KEEPING US MORE CONNECTED THAN I WAS ON SUBMARINES IN THE 1990S AND 2000S. ON MY TWO SHIPS, I DEPLOYED THREE TIMES—A TOTAL OF SEVENTEEN MONTHS OF DEPLOYMENT, NOT COUNTING ALL THE TIME AT SEA GETTING READY TO DEPLOY. ON A DEPLOYING SUBMARINE, YOU SPEND MONTHS ON END WITH 140 FELLOW SAILORS, BUT YOU DO NOT SEE YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS BACK HOME, OTHER THAN MAYBE SEEING YOUR SIGNIFICANT OTHER AT A MID-DEPLOYMENT PORT CALL FOR A FEW DAYS. WHEN I FIRST WENT TO SEA, COMMUNICATIONS FROM HOME WERE LIMITED TO A 60 WORD “FAMILY-GRAM” AND WERE SCREENED BY THE CAPTAIN TO MAKE SURE YOU RECEIVED NO BAD NEWS—THE IDEA WAS TO PREVENT ANY DISTRACTIONS OVER THINGS THAT YOU COULD DO NOTHING ABOUT. BEFORE MY TOUR ENDED ON MY FIRST SHIP, WE STARTED RECEIVING EMAIL, BUT COULD NOT SEND IT. WE WERE FAIRLY ISOLATED FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD—WE RECEIVED NEWS VIA RADIO MESSAGE TRAFFIC WITH A FEW SENTENCES OR PARAGRAPHS ABOUT CURRENT EVENTS, MIXED IN WITH SPORTS SCORES, WHICH IS A FAR CRY FROM THE ROBUST AMOUNT OF INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON THE INTERNET DURING THIS PANDEMIC. I STILL RECALL BEING DUMBFOUNDED BY THE UTTER DEVASTATION OF THE GULF COAST BY HURRICANE KATRINA WHEN I FINALLY PULLED INTO PORT AND SAW NEWSPAPER PHOTOS. MY KNOWLEDGE OF SPORTS FROM THE LATE-1990S AND MID-2000S IS A LITTLE SKETCHY TOO. SO, ALTHOUGH THIS IS A ROUGH TIME, WITH SO MANY OF OUR DAILY ROUTINES DISRUPTED, I AM THANKFUL FOR OUR NEAR INSTANTANEOUS COMMUNICATIONS, AND A STEADY STREAM OF NEWS, WHETHER PRINTED ONLINE OR ON TV. WITH SO MANY GREAT TECHNOLOGIES, WE ARE ABLE TO STAY CONNECTED TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS, AND WITH THE GREAT IT RESOURCES WE HAVE AT THE FIRM, WE HAVE THE ABILITY TO WORK PRETTY SEAMLESSLY—I HAVE WORKED ON TWO MAJOR BRIEFS DURING THIS TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING, AND I AM AMAZED AT HOW WELL THE WINSTON TEAM DID ON PULLING THEM TOGETHER FROM SO MANY DIFFERENT LOCATIONS.

HOW WAS YOUR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH TESTED DURING YOUR TIME ON SUBMARINES?

AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, SPENDING MONTHS ON END IN A SUBMARINE IS MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY DRAINING. FOR MOST OF THE CREW, DAYS ON A SUBMARINE WERE HISTORICALLY DIVIDED INTO FOUR SIX-HOUR WATCHES, BUT THERE WERE ONLY THREE “WATCH TEAMS” TO MAN THOSE FOUR WATCHES. SO FOR EVERY SUCCESSIVE WATCH, MY ROUTINE WOULD START SIX HOURS EARLIER. IF I STOOD THE MORNING WATCH FROM 06-12, THEN THE NEXT DAY, I WAS STANDING THE MID-WATCH, FROM 00-06. THAT WORKED OUT TO SIX HOURS ON WATCH, SIX HOURS PERFORMING NON-WATCHSTANDING DUTIES—FOR ME, OFTEN ADMINISTRATIVE PAPERWORK AND, ON DEPLOYMENT, MEETING TO DISCUSS THE EVENTS ON MY LAST WATCH, BUT FOR OTHERS, IT INCLUDED MAINTENANCE

ON EQUIPMENT, OR FOR YOUNGER SAILORS, STUDYING SHIP'S SYSTEMS TO BECOME "QUALIFIED"—AND THEN, NOMINALLY SIX HOURS FOR SLEEP. BUT SOMETIMES WE HAD MEETINGS OR TRAINING SCHEDULED DURING THAT "DOWN" TIME. AS YOU CAN IMAGINE, WE WERE OFTEN VERY TIRED. ON TOP OF THE SCHEDULE, THE WATCHES AND THE WORK WERE OFTEN STRESSFUL, DEPENDING UPON WHERE IN THE WORLD WE WERE AND WHAT WE WERE DOING. ONE JOB FOR FAST-ATTACK SUBMARINES IS GATHERING INFORMATION, SOMETIMES WITH A PERISCOPE RAISED AND THE SHIP AT PERISCOPE DEPTH, WHILE STILL REMAINING UNDETECTED, EVEN BY FISHERMEN AND MERCHANT SHIPPING. THAT CAN BE VERY STRESSFUL, PARTICULARLY IN SHALLOW WATER WHERE YOU CANNOT ESCAPE BY GOING DEEPER. WE SPENT A GOOD AMOUNT OF TIME PREPARING FOR THE WORST—FIRE, FLOODING, STEAM LINE RUPTURE, CONTROL SURFACE CASUALTIES—SO THAT WE WOULD BE READY IF SOMETHING BAD HAPPENED. AFTER MY FIRST EXTENDED UNDERWAY, I SAW ONE JUNIOR CREWMEMBER CRACK UP—HE HAD TO BE ESCORTED BACK TO THE STATES FROM EUROPE.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN AND WHAT TIPS CAN YOU SHARE WITH OTHERS IN THE FIRM ABOUT STAYING PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY FIT WHILE STAYING ISOLATED AND AT HOME?

I THINK PART OF THE CHALLENGE IS ESTABLISHING AND STICKING WITH A ROUTINE, STAYING DISCIPLINED ABOUT THE RIGHT THINGS, BUT ALSO TAKING A LITTLE BIT OF TIME TO TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND ENJOY YOURSELF. EVERY DAY ON THE SHIP, I HAD A SET ROUTINE BEFORE TAKING THE WATCH, AND I DID IT EVERY SINGLE DAY (REALLY, EVERY 18 HOURS). WHEN I HAD THE AFTERNOON WATCH, OR WHEN I WAS FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE ON A 24-HOUR SCHEDULE TOWARDS THE END OF MY TIME ON ACTIVE DUTY, THEN ONE FUN RITUAL MANY NIGHTS WAS TO "BURN A FLICK"—WATCHING 8 MM MOVIES SENT TO US BY MWR, "MORALE, WELFARE, AND RECREATION." SATURDAYS WERE "FIELD DAY"—NOT NEARLY AS FUN AS IT SOUNDS, BUT IMPORTANT NONETHELESS. IT WAS THE DAY THE WHOLE CREW CLEANED THE SHIP—NORMALLY FROM 8 A.M. TO 11 A.M.—EXCEPT IF YOU WERE ON WATCH. BUT WE CAPPED THE DAY OFF BY HAVING PIZZA NIGHT—CELEBRATING ANOTHER WEEK IN THE BOOKS. SUNDAYS WERE MORE LEISURELY—FOR THE PEOPLE THAT WENT TO CHURCH BACK HOME, WE HAD CHURCH SERVICES IN THE MORNING—AND OTHER THAN STANDING WATCH, THAT WAS ABOUT IT. SO THERE WAS A CERTAIN RHYTHM OF THE WEEK THAT WE TRIED TO MAINTAIN.

I THINK THERE IS SOMETHING TO BE SAID FOR THAT HERE. WORKING AT HOME, IT IS EASY FOR THE BOUNDARIES TO BLUR. I THINK THAT ESTABLISHING (AND KEEPING) ROUTINES HELPS US MAINTAIN SOME SENSE OF NORMALCY, EVEN IN THESE UNCERTAIN TIMES. I TRY TO KEEP A ROUTINE DURING THE DAY AS TO WAKING, WORKING, AND EATING. JUST LIKE ON THE SHIP, I TRY TO TAKE SOME TIME AFTER DINNER TO SIT AND WATCH TV WITH MY FAMILY AND UNWIND A LITTLE. WE TRY TO ENJOY THE WEEKENDS IN A UNIQUE WAY, WHETHER IT IS ORDERING OUT SOME SPECIAL DISH OR INDULGING IN A PANCAKE BREAKFAST, AND THEN "GOING" TO CHURCH VIA YOUTUBE ON SUNDAY. WE HAVE EVEN BEEN DOING A LITTLE EXTRA CLEANING ON SATURDAY MORNINGS, ALTHOUGH I HAVE NOT YET TAUGHT MY SONS THE MEANING OF THE PHRASE "FIELD DAY."

I THINK STAYING PHYSICALLY ACTIVE IS REALLY IMPORTANT TOO. ON THE SHIP, WE ALWAYS HAD WORKOUT EQUIPMENT, WITH THE CHOICES VARYING SOMEWHAT DEPENDING UPON WHETHER WE WERE IN OUR LOCAL OPERATING AREAS OR OVERSEAS ON DEPLOYMENT—SOME COMBINATION OF FREE WEIGHTS, ELLIPTICALS, TREADMILLS, STATIONARY BIKES, OR ROWING MACHINES. WORKING OUT WAS GREAT FOR BURNING OFF STEAM—EATING WELL (SUBMARINES ACCOUNT FOR SOME OF THE BEST COOKING IN THE NAVY) AND WORKING OUT DEFINITELY HELPED US DEAL WITH THE STRESS. THESE DAYS, THE GYMS ARE ALL CLOSED, BUT THERE ARE PLENTY OF ONLINE RESOURCES—MY WIFE LOVES ONLINE YOGA, AND I'VE SEEN PEOPLE BUYING PELOTONS AND OTHER INTERACTIVE WORKOUT SYSTEMS RECENTLY. IN HOUSTON, WE ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE

A FAIR AMOUNT OF OPEN SPACE TO GO WALK, OR RUN. WE HAVE AN ELLIPTICAL AT HOME. I'VE SHOT BASKETS WITH MY TWO BOYS IN OUR DRIVEWAY, AND AFTER THEIR BASEBALL SEASONS WERE CUT SHORT THIS YEAR, I HAVE ALSO TRIED TO KEEP UP THEIR SKILLS BY PLAYING CATCH IN THE BACKYARD. FOR THOSE WITH LIMITED SPACE AND NO FITNESS EQUIPMENT, I THINK BACK TO THE BASICS THAT JUST REQUIRED A LITTLE BIT OF FLOOR SPACE—BODY WEIGHT EXERCISES AND CALISTHENICS. ON THE SHIP, WORKOUTS TYPICALLY TOOK PLACE IN THE ENGINE ROOM—WE WOULD FIND LITTLE NOOKS AND CRANNIES OUT OF THE WAY OF THE SAILORS STANDING WATCH, WHERE WE COULD DO SIT-UPS, CRUNCHES, LEG LIFTS, AND PUSH-UPS TO NAME A FEW. BACK IN PORT, WE WOULD DO PLENTY OF OTHER CALISTHENICS THAT DID NOT TAKE ANY EQUIPMENT LIKE JUMPING JACKS, DEEP KNEE BENDS, AND SOME EXERCISES THAT INCORPORATED ELEMENTS OF SEVERAL DIFFERENT CALISTHENICS. I THINK MANY OF THESE ARE STILL VALUABLE FOR KEEPING FIT TODAY.

DOES YOUR EXPERIENCE IN THE NAVY GIVE YOU A BROADER VIEW OF HOW TO COPE WITH BEING ISOLATED, PARTICULARLY WITH THE UNCERTAINTY OF WHEN THINGS WILL “GET BACK TO NORMAL”?

I THINK SO, TO SOME EXTENT. PRACTICING LAW CAN BE PRETTY STRESSFUL, AND I'VE CERTAINLY HAD MY SHARE OF STRESS IN THE NAVY, AND A LOT OF THE UNCERTAINTY IN THESE TIMES IS TROUBLING. WE HAVE HAD FRIENDS TOUCHED BY COVID-19—ONE OF MY GOOD FRIENDS LOST HIS MOTHER TO IT, AND OTHER FRIENDS HAVE HAD PARENTS OR IN-LAWS STRUGGLING THROUGH IT. I LOOK BACK AT MY TIME ON MY TWO SHIPS, AND I RECOGNIZED THEN AND NOW THAT THERE IS A LOT I CANNOT CONTROL. THERE WERE TIMES I WAS EXTENDED AT SEA BECAUSE THE MISSION DICTATED IT. I HAD A CLOSE FRIEND WHO HAD TO STAY AT SEA AND MISS THE BIRTH OF HIS SECOND CHILD, A REMARKABLE HARDSHIP. AND SO I TRY TO HAVE AN APPRECIATION FOR WHAT I CAN CONTROL AND WHAT I CANNOT CONTROL. BACK ON THE SHIP, ONE THING THAT WAS ALWAYS INFORMALLY STRESSED WAS BEING A GOOD “SHIPMATE,” WHICH AT THE MOST BASIC LEVEL WAS SUPPORTING YOUR FRIENDS WHEN THEY HAD TOUGH TIMES, MAYBE STEPPING UP TO DO SOMETHING TO MAKE THEIR LIVES A LITTLE EASIER, OR BEING WATCHFUL FOR OTHERS. SOMETIMES LIFE WAS REALLY STRESSFUL, BUT IT HELPED TO LOOK ON THE GOOD SIDE OF THINGS AND TO BE CHEERFUL IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY. THESE DAYS, I AM TRYING MY BEST TO BE PATIENT WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND CO-WORKERS, APPRECIATING THEM, AND RELYING UPON THEM AS BUILT-IN SUPPORT NETWORKS. ALTHOUGH WE ARE ALL ISOLATED, WE ARE FORTUNATE TO SHARE A GOOD DEAL OF INTERCONNECTEDNESS, AND JUST LIKE ON THE SHIP, A LOT OF SHARED EXPERIENCES—WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

AS I SAID, I AM TRYING TO FIND THE POSITIVE IN THIS. JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO, MY WIFE AND I WERE JUGGLING TWO CAREERS, SCHOOL FOR MY TWO BOYS, AS WELL AS THEIR TWO DIFFERENT BASKETBALL PRACTICE SCHEDULES, AND TWO DIFFERENT BASEBALL PRACTICES. LIFE WAS HECTIC—IT WAS MARKED BY GOODBYES IN THE MORNING AND HELLOS IN THE EVENING. NOW I SEE EACH OF THEM EVERY DAY, ALL DAY. I GET TO SEE WHAT MY TWO BOYS ARE STUDYING DURING THE DAY (ALTHOUGH, ADMITTEDLY, THEY ARE NOT AS GOOD AT SHARING COMMON OFFICE SPACE AS MY COLLEAGUES AT WINSTON'S HOUSTON OFFICE). I HAVE HAD VIDEO CHATS WITH MY SIBLINGS AND PARENTS, WHERE PHONE CALLS MIGHT HAVE PASSED MUSTER IN THE PAST. I HAVE TAKEN THE TIME TO RECONNECT WITH FRIENDS FAR AND NEAR, WHEREAS I MIGHT NOT HAVE AMIDST A HECTIC SCHEDULE. I AM LOOKING FORWARD TO THINGS GETTING BACK TO NORMAL, AND TO SEEING ALL OF MY WINSTON CO-WORKERS EACH WEEKDAY AGAIN, BUT I LIKE TO THINK THAT SOME GOOD HAS COME WITH THESE CHALLENGING TIMES.

I ALSO WANTED TO SHARE THAT OTHER SUBMARINERS HAVE BEEN SHARING THEIR PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL DISTANCING, OR THE MEDIA HAVE BEEN REPORTING ON SUBMARINE SOCIAL DISTANCING:

[CORONAVIRUS: SUBMARINE CAPTAIN'S ADVICE ON SOCIAL ISOLATION](#)

[ASTRONAUTS CAN TEACH US ABOUT ISOLATION](#)

[HOW A NUCLEAR SUBMARINE OFFICER LEARNED TO LIVE IN TIGHT QUARTERS](#)

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Richard T. McCarty

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