

Ways Festival and Event Professionals Can Positively Contribute and Give Back During – And After – The Pandemic

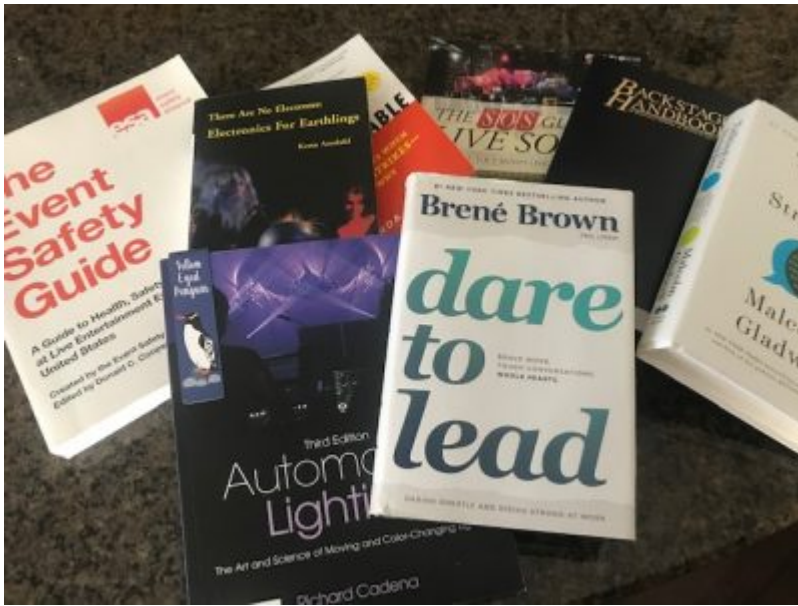
Back in March when the pandemic was just starting, like many in the event and festival industries, I suddenly found virtually all of my projects ground to a halt.

And while it was painful, confusing, and scary to deal with so much loss so quickly, after taking some time to process it all (mainly, staying in bed afraid to look at more cancellation emails & texts), I decided to finally use this newfound free time to focus on various goals I've only half-heartedly attempted before (and often used the "I'm too busy, gotta focus on the next gig" excuse to fully see them through).

I took this time to evaluate not only my professional and personal goals, but also my purpose, my values, and my boundaries. How would I want to emerge from this? How can I improve myself now in order to better serve others when we're back – both my event teams as well as those in need? How can I best maintain an others-focused, grateful, compassionate mentality when everything around me seems to be falling apart?

First, I implemented daily habits of meditating, journaling, exercising, and improving my Spanish (*Siempre quise hablar con fluidez!*). Next, I picked up several different books (both new and ones that I admittedly started months ago) and I joined a book club with some colleagues (*a good list of books to read [can be found here](#)*). And in April, I started to

research where I might be able to give back & help others – safely, with COVID measures in place.



Examples of some recommended books

And as a result, **I've discovered some excellent ways to volunteer and help others** – and some even have festival and event elements to them. I imagine variations of these are available in most cities around the country as well:

- Your local food bank. Here in Austin, with the [Central Texas Food Bank](#) you can pick from sorting food inside their massive warehouse, or distributing food via a drive through setup at their mobile pantries. Both are wonderful experiences but I tend to prefer the mobile pantries, as they are closer to mini-events (complete with 2 way radios and high viz) plus you get to directly (but with social distancing) interact with people who need food.



Volunteering at a mobile pantry for the Central Texas Food Bank

- [Habitat for Humanity](#). You can work either at a job site building a home or at their ReStore retail outlet stocking shelves. The site leaders are very patient with those new to home construction and will guide you on how to use all power tools and other gear.



Hanging up siding at a HFH house in Austin

- Donate blood or plasma. The need for this, especially if you're a universal donor, is more than ever. Here in Austin, [We Are Blood](#) ensures you are comfortable the entire time.



Giving blood in Austin at We Are Blood

- Homeless organizations. In Austin, we have [The Other Ones](#) who help provide our homeless neighbors with paying jobs, showers, food, case workers, and much more. You can help at their front desk or outside checking people in who want a shower.



Manning the front desk at The Other Ones' headquarters at Camp Esperanza in Austin

- Voting / polling help. Most of these are actually paid roles, and the need for help at the polls this year is at a crucial level. Visit [Power the Polls](#) to sign up. I

plan to work for a local polling station on Election Day.

- Various Live Event organizations trying to secure funding. This includes national groups like [NIVA](#) / [#SaveOurStages](#), [#WeMakeEvents](#), and local groups in Austin like the [Amplified Sound Coalition](#). Being present at rallies, group discussions, and other safe gatherings will help our lawmakers see just how many people are affected and how passionate we are about ensuring our way of life is kept alive.



[ILIOS Productions](#) in Austin, one of the many vendors participating in #RedAlertRestart for #WeMakeEvents on September 1st, 2020

Mike Speaks At ASC's "Load Out", a Discussion on Mental Health For Our Industry

I can tell that participating in these important programs **have helped me as much as I've helped others**; it feels so good – and normal – to be useful, part of a team, and seeing the positive impact immediately. It's done wonders to keep my mental health strong when it's easy to get discouraged the longer this pandemic wears on. If you have the time and ability, I highly encourage you look into your local charities to see how you can help.



Working a Tito's Hand
Sanitizer giveaway in
Texas

There may even be paid opportunities to help others impacted by the pandemic, such as the role I had helping distribute tens of thousands of hand sanitizer bottles through [Tito's](#) throughout Texas this past summer or the polling work described above.

And once our industry bounces back, my goal will be to continue helping with non-profit organizations such as these – by more fully integrating these acts of service with my event & festival teams or by dedicating more of my energy and presence to these causes through more efficient scheduling and time management.

If you have any questions about volunteering for any of these organizations, or if you have other organizations you wish to highlight, please reach out to me at mike@festivalandeventproduction.com!

Thank you for reading, and to close, here's a quote that's become my new mantra:

“The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.” – Leo Rosten