What a time to be alive, friends! No sense wasting ink and space talking about how intense, confusing, and overwhelming all of this is. No, we already do that for the first 15 minutes of every Zoom call! The question of today isn’t whether or not our reality is completely shifted — it’s about how on earth we’re coping with it all.

Some of you know us already, but for those that don’t; Hi. We’re Tina and James. We’re professional speakers who work with (your) students and professionals on campuses across the country. We spend most of our time either in airports coming or going to the next speaking engagement, or in a large room full of people helping students connect and grow while reminding them they matter.

Well … we used to do that.

Obviously much like everyone, our worlds have changed dramatically. For one, we’ve been in the same apartment with one another for over two weeks now and are still in love — woooo! We’re not traveling or speaking, but we are learning an incredible amount about online education platforms. We keep saying the sentence: “This is fascinating …”

The most interesting part of our adjustment to this new and confusing world is that we are handling it very differently. The observation made to us most often is “You two are like the same person. What’s it like to be married to yourself?” Turns out, we’re two very different humans with different responses to a global pandemic and the shutting down of the world. Who knew?

Tina here! I would categorize my reaction to the coronavirus and its carnage as frozen. And not “Frozen 1: I just discovered I have magical powers and I’m stuck,” frozen. No, more like “Frozen 2: I’ve gone down to the abyss of cold and memory where I am officially, permanently frozen” frozen. Stuck. Stalled. So many people around me were immediately ready to get to work, rolling up their sleeves to set up their double monitors, learning how to host Zoom meetings, providing motivation and encouragement online, and turning their content into online classes. Not me. I did two 500-piece puzzles in 10 days. I cleaned out the cabinet under the sink. I discovered Disney+ had the complete series of Boy Meets World, grabbed a blanket, and got horizontal.

It’s been approximately 2 1/2 weeks since our world stopped turning, and I’m starting to adapt, to thaw. I have been able to show up online meaningfully for the clients that have asked me to. I
have been able to read a little bit every day. I’ve been able to begin to strategize for our business. I’ve been able to write this article. I’m starting to feel less frozen. But it has been and will continue to be a bit of a crapshoot for me. Some days, I will wake up feeling motivated, ready, and strong. Others, I’ll wake up looking and feeling like the Sad Character from “Inside Out.” I’ll mope and cry, freezing all over again. And that’s okay.

James here! When I first realized we may be in for the long haul with the virus, I had a burst of ideas. Four of my top five Strengths are Futurist, Activator, Ideation, and Positivity (the other one is Woo ... but you already knew that, winky face). So, I am wired to plan for the future with hope. And then, those great ideas just sat. These dreams and plans just sat in my brain for over two weeks — a whole lot of shoulds floating around. I knew I should do something. With all the time on my hands I should have been carpe-ing the hell out every diem. But I wasn’t. In life, we learn how to swim after we get in the pool, but it just didn’t feel right to jump in.

It felt weird not knowing when the quarantine was (is) going to end. It’s hard to set goals when you’re surrounded by ambiguity. It’s strange to dream when you don’t know when life is going back to “normal.” So, I tried to let myself feel emotions when I needed, and I tried to find ways to get to work. I jumped on a bunch of Zoom calls, signed up for webinars, and read about what others were doing with their businesses. But still, in ours, I was doing nothing. Until this week. This week it started to feel right — right to move, to plan, to dream, to hope, and to take action. It took me two weeks to turn my shoulds into plans. And that’s okay.

However you are processing, however you are making meaning, or showing up in the world right now, is okay. Our current reality is unlike anything we’ve experienced in our lifetimes, and not just because we’re young and adorable — my 80-year-old grandmother keeps saying “I’ve never seen anything like this!”

While we cope and process differently, we continue to remind ourselves and one another that no one wins the Struggle Olympics. Comparing ourselves, our reactions, our productivity (or lack thereof) to others’ serves no one. In fact, it does nothing but add shame to the pile of feelings we’re carrying with us. Life is already too damn heavy these days — let’s not add more weight.

Each of us is allowed to process, grieve, and accomplish however it makes sense to us to do so. There’s no “right” response to this. All we can do is try. Try to get out of bed with purpose. Try to connect with the friends we have and have not checked on. Try a new hobby. Try to get outside in a safe and responsible way. Try to care for our students. Try to remain patient with the
coworker who continually forgets to mute themselves on a conference call. And try to care for ourselves.

We don’t know what trying looks like for you. What we do know is that if you don’t know either yet, that is okay. If you don’t know tomorrow, that is okay. Eventually it will be time — to start, to do, to thaw, to move. Not because of a “should,” or because of shame. Because this is what we do. As leaders, as helpers, as sisters, siblings, and brothers, we try.

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James and Tina are both Professional Speakers with JamesAndTina.Co. Feel free to follow them @TinaRaeVan and @JamesTRobo on social media!