

Opinion **Work & Careers**

The hard business lessons Covid is about to teach

Why the hair salon, the gym and work-related travel may never be the same again

PILITA CLARK



Guess what? I discovered home hair-dye kits are almost as good as salon colouring © Getty

Pilita Clark YESTERDAY

I have very few friends who could plausibly be described as gym fanatics.

But I do have one in London who has been working out with weights since he was 14, up to six days a week, most recently at a nice health club that costs him £30 a month, thanks to a corporate discount.

He's in his early forties and when he told me last week he had cancelled his membership and was never going back, I was shocked.

It turned out life in lockdown had led him to consult YouTube, where he had discovered [callisthenics](#) — exercises you can do at home without barbells or fancy equipment.

Out went bench presses in the gym. In came chest dips at his kitchen bench, with results he had never thought possible.

“In the six months I’ve been doing callisthenics, I’ve reshaped my body and got so much stronger,” he said, a note of wonder in his voice. Everyone at work had dumped their gym memberships too, he added, as had his wife. And just think: but for the pandemic, he never would have thought of doing something he wished he had started years ago.

Listening to him talk reminded me of a question that keeps recurring as the Covid crisis goes on.

Will my friend’s discovery — and others like it — end up leaving even deeper scars on some business sectors than the lockdowns and social distancing that are causing so much financial pain today?

Put another way, once you learn that you can do something cheaper, faster and better at home, will you ever go back to paying someone else more to do it for you?

When it comes to hair, I think not.

Pre-pandemic, I spent hundreds of pounds, and hours of my weekends, keeping grey roots and other follicular atrocities at bay.

When salons closed, I discovered something I never imagined possible: a friend next door could do just as good a job in a third of the time with a [£6.49 packet](#) of Clairol hair dye.

I still remember staring in the mirror at the results of her first effort — also done with help from YouTube — and thinking: why didn’t I do this years ago?

It is true there have been tense moments. Once, we got so caught up blathering that we forgot to check how long to leave the colour on. Thus I learnt that, even though the instructions say 35 minutes at most, you can keep it in for 40 without any visible damage.

So will I chuck my old hairdresser? Not entirely. My friend draws the line at a cut and blow-dry, so salon-level maintenance will be needed. Just not nearly as much as before.

So are hair salons in trouble post-Covid? I have no idea. I may be a serious outlier.

If I had to take a stab, I would guess that cinemas will survive Netflix (nothing matches the group experience); Zoom will kill much business travel (now that we know how to use it); and cafés will be fine.

On the matter of gyms, I am agnostic.

I too have cancelled my membership, having discovered the park-based seven-minute workout. And my callisthenics friend is not alone.

Shares in Peloton surged to [record highs](#) last month after soaring sales of its high-tech indoor exercise bikes. Once buyers get into the habit of at-home workouts, some analysts think they won't go back to the gym.

Still, I suspect experts such as [Chloe Demrovsky](#) have a point. She heads the Disaster Recovery Institute International, a non-profit group that does business continuity training for everything from the World Bank to Walmart. She has also cancelled her gym membership — but just for now.

Are you under 30?



We are exploring the impact of the pandemic on young people and want to hear from readers between 16 and 30. Tell us about your experiences from the past six months via a [short survey](#).

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Once the pandemic eases, she thinks people will crowd back into bars and restaurants, where they will soon be saying: “Have you been to that new, bespoke kick-boxing gym? Well, I did. Let's try it.”

“This is the sort of thing that people do when they get together,” she told me recently. Some things may change permanently, but not as many as we now think. “Right now, we're in a strange period of rediscovery,” she says, and it may not last.

She is probably right, but it's a period of rediscovery that I hope will last for quite a while to come.

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