

Working for Starbucks during Covid-19 has been many things. At the onset of the pandemic, it was fortunate that all of the frontline employees were offered the option to stay home, paid, for a month and a half. I chose to take this option, and thankful because I know it wasn't something offered to everyone in the country. However, staying home and not leaving the house for six weeks takes an emotional toll. When I think back to that time, it all feels like a blur. Impending doom, empty streets and emotional instability. Depression seeped in at the edges, as the lack of responsibility and structure brought to the forefront my worst impulses. Staying home was the right decision for my physical health, but I was happy to go back to work when I did.

When I re-entered the workforce, strict cleaning procedures were in place to ensure that we all felt safe. Thirty minute handwashing timers, constant sanitizing of high contact surfaces, and mandatory mask wearing for employees as well as a not well enforced social distancing policy; its difficult to stay six feet apart when you're rushing coffee out of a drive through window, walking past your co-workers to find ingredients or restock cups. Over time, these routines became normalized, and the stress of working in new conditions subsided.

However, new stressors were introduced as the company rushed a return to 'normalcy'. Initially, only stores with drive-throughs re-opened, and their lobbies remained locked. There was pressure to re-open our lobby, first for pickup only and eventually to allow customers to stay in store to drink their coffee and work - typical Starbucks stuff. The comfort level of the workers was little considered by those pushing for it who, notably, did not work at the in-store level. A couple of stores had to close for two weeks due to employees contracting Covid. Mine, thankfully, has not.