

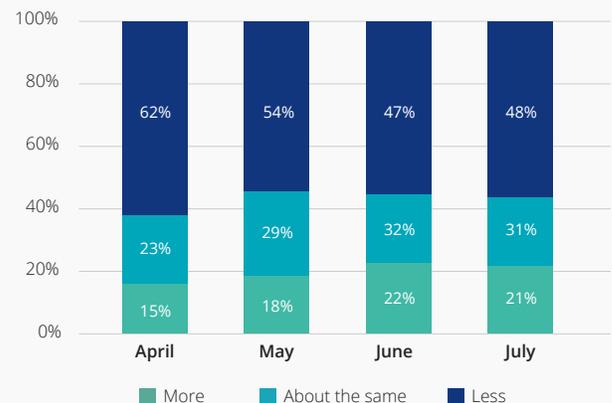


Your next trip: Wholly foreign & largely domestic

Our world has become smaller. Instead of exploring faraway summer destinations or jetting off to the next business meeting, many of us have spent several months at home—making the best of virtual alternatives and perhaps considering a road trip. Effectively all forms of travel have seen dramatic reductions—leisure travel has shown some signs of recovery, but business travel remains particularly tenuous. This has forced many travel and hospitality companies to reconsider their revenue models and think strategically about restoring confidence and maximizing safety for all travelers, but with a more resolute focus on the leisure market.

Despite the uncertainty caused by the pandemic and economic turbulence, the desire to travel is returning—slowly, but steadily. According to [Deloitte’s State of the Consumer Tracker](#), about 20% of respondents are planning to spend more on travel—and this number has been on the rise since April. However, a third of people have also plateaued at their current level of spend (conveyed in *Figure A*), implying that those more comfortable venturing out have returned to travel or are making plans to do so, while those more cautious—or financially constrained—are avoiding it¹.

Figure A
Travelers’ expected spending on travel



Source: Deloitte State of the Consumer Tracker, July 2020

To understand these changes at a more nuanced level, our multidisciplinary research with 16,000 participants revealed that **Americans fall into one of three distinct patterns of attitudes and behaviors**—we call them **Clusters**. Each Cluster is named to convey the mindsets and motivations of the individuals within it. **Protectors** are feeling anxious, acting with concern for personal and public health; **Pragmatists** are feeling calm and acting with balance, mindful of the public good and accepting of the current state; **Prevailers** are feeling skeptical, acting with confidence, tolerant of higher health risks and believe that getting back to “normal” is key. So, how do we expect these Clusters to travel in the future?

We know that the pandemic has amplified universal human needs for **trust, safety, and connection**. These priorities are crucial for organizations to act on across three main phases

of the traveler’s journey: Discover, the initial questions about when, where, how and if we are going to travel; Prepare, the activities after booking a trip prior to departure; and Engage, the interactions that occur during the on-site experience. In *Figure B*, we explore how each Cluster might interact within each phase.

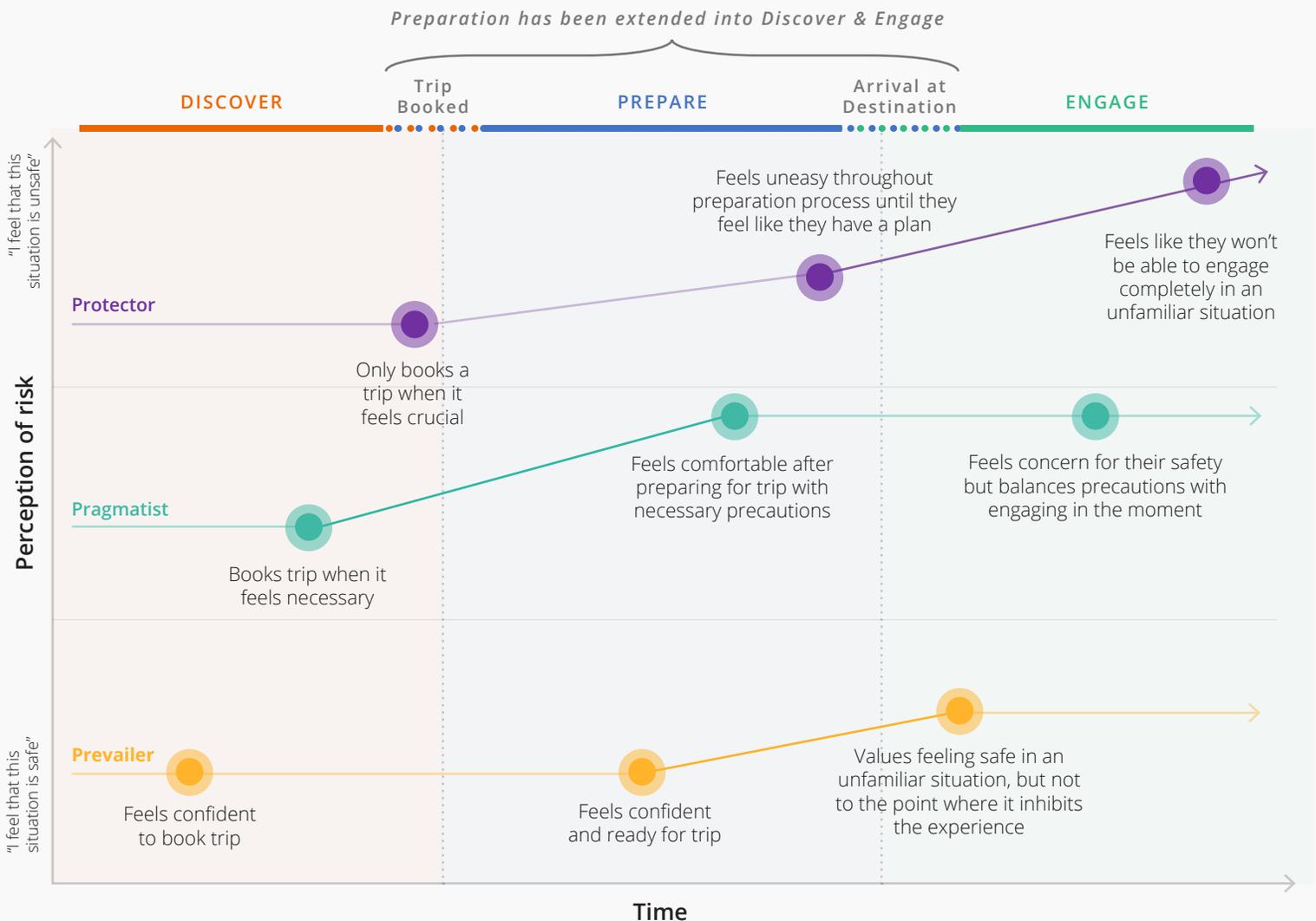
Travelers are shifting their focus to the Discover and Prepare phases in search of options that can meet their needs for trust, safety, and connection. In response, hotels, airlines, car rental companies, and restaurants should invest in the Discover and Prepare phases to build a solid relationship with customers, while reimagining the Engage phase to deliver on their promise. During this time of reduced traffic, organizations can use the opportunity to innovate on their processes, infrastructure, and systems across the customer journey, using the new priorities as a guiding north star.

Figure B

TRAVELERS’ JOURNEYS THROUGH AN EMOTIONAL LENS

A visual summary of how each Cluster might interact with each phase and key emotional points along the way.

 **Key Emotional Point**



Booking a trip

Many Prevailers feel confident to travel—even now. Pragmatists proceed with caution, using due diligence to build their confidence. Protectors, on the other hand, need to be convinced with a valid reason and clear evidence of safety.

Getting ready for a trip

Pragmatists and Protectors feel anxious when preparing, but more in control when communications are personal and tell them what to expect. Prevailers might trust a message from a company as much as their own readiness.

Engaging on a trip

Protectors are on high-alert at all times, ready to respond if the environment feels unsafe. Conversely, Prevailers are hopeful that pandemic-related changes don't diminish their experience. Pragmatists balance caution with a desire for enjoyment.

DISCOVER

Arriving at a decision

Before COVID, the need and desire to travel was expansive—we traveled for business, for an escape from reality, for connecting with new cultures—but now, motivations to travel have narrowed. Heightened safety concerns have diminished many travelers' sense of trust in the outside world, testing how far outside their comfort zone they are willing to go. As a result, new criteria and variables concerning purpose, destination, and company response are driving factors affecting travel decisions.

Purpose: Why should I travel?

Business travel has become almost non-existent, and for leisure, visiting family has become one of the only acceptable reasons to travel during the pandemic. This is especially true for Protectors, 50% of whom report being likely to visit family out of state as COVID subsides (second in likelihood only to “short road trip to nearby destination” at 65%)². When considering leisure travel, many prioritize feelings of safety over the usual trade-offs for time, distance, and cost.

For example, Maizah, a Protector and mother of three living in Dallas, TX, usually flies to visit her family in California but, like many others, currently views ground transportation as a safer alternative to airplanes. Instead of flying, she chose to pack up the family in her personal car to make the trek. Overall, 5x more participants perceived airlines to be riskier than rental cars.³ Leisure traveler Katie expresses her worries:

☹☹ The fact that I will not know the health of any of those people on the plane, yet spend hours with them, is a huge concern for me.”⁴

– Katie, 29, Dallas, TX (Protector)

When children are added into the equation, even Prevailers' comfort levels shrink. While Prevailer and frequent business traveler Michael expressed minimal concern about resuming business travel, he shared apprehension about balancing travel with his kids' safety.

☹☹ I'd get on a plane tomorrow if I had a good enough reason [...] A business trip is one thing. To pack the kids on an international flight and be in the plane for you know nine hours or whatever...That's something I'm not ready to do until this is fully blown over.”⁵

– Michael, 43, Yardley, PA (Prevailer)

Destination: Where should (or can) I go?

Compared to pre-COVID, people are 43% less likely to stay overnight in a major international destination as the crisis subsides⁶, pointing to travelers' desire to avoid long-haul trips to crowded places—especially abroad. International trips to explore the world have been replaced by a rise in domestic, nature-based, and isolationist trips closer to home—such as camping or hiking—in which travelers can enjoy leisure time without significant human contact and save money to boot.

Geographical safety considerations that few people considered pre-COVID are now a major part of the decision-making process. Many travelers will research a destination's case count, current situation, and restrictions—and also their home state or country's restrictions upon return:

☹☹ To possibly get in trouble with a pandemic [while] overseas is very scary, because you may or may not be allowed back into the country.”⁷

– Andrew, 56, Fort Lauderdale, FL (Protector)

Many participants are hesitant to resume activities restricted by pandemic guidelines, but if they do choose to participate, they expect the price point to be in-line with the resulting value. If they feel that the experience will be diminished, they might look for alternatives that enable them to not sacrifice as much of the experience.

☹☹ [At theme parks], they want you to stay six feet from the characters; my kids run up to [them] when they see him, [you can't tell them to] stay away. Instead of spending all that money we've found other things to do in the area...like the zoo and the beach.”⁸

– Jack, 30, Marshall, MI (Pragmatist)

Business actions: What changes have been made by companies that I am considering?

Travelers are looking for signals from companies that changes have been made in response to the pandemic; many are reading up on company policies—at twice the rate as pre-COVID⁹. Protectors and Pragmatists like Evan, a frequent business traveler from Chicago, will evaluate the experience for safety and reliability before booking:

☹☹ I want to know exactly how the airports, airlines, hotels, and other travel companies are adapting and implementing safety measures. I don't want to go somewhere where some are wearing PPE and others are not. It's just too risky for health and possible physical [and] verbal altercations that would not be worth it.”¹⁰

– Evan, 42, Chicago, IL (Pragmatist)

To help travelers make informed decisions about destination, purpose, and company response, companies can proactively communicate the steps they are taking to ensure safety during travel (e.g. mask requirements or plane fogging procedures), as well as COVID-related information as an added thoughtful step for travelers (e.g. potential border restrictions, new government or safety measures).

Figure C

DISCOVER

How clusters think about booking travel

The following depicts how clusters might differ in their thought processes and decisions when booking travel.

Key

- Common for Protectors
- Common for Pragmatists
- Common for Prevailers
- All Clusters
- Uncommon Choice

What are the new considerations?

Do I think this trip is worth the risk?

What **sources** do I trust that tell me traveling is safe right now?

I want to travel

I shouldn't. It puts me and others at risk

I should. If I take the necessary precautions

4x

Protectors are 4x as likely to be nervous traveling as Prevailers

Why should I travel?

To visit family or friends

To explore the world or take a spontaneous trip

What are the **latest COVID numbers** where I want to go?

What are the **guidelines and requirements** in the destination?

If I am exposed to COVID, will I have **access** to tests and care?

Will businesses be open and will the trip still be worth it?

Where should (or can) I go?

International. I'm nervous about requirements and if I can come home

Domestic. It feels safer, but I need to figure out where I can go

55%

Prevailers are 55% more likely to take an international trip than Pragmatists and Protectors, but it is still an uncommon choice

89%

Pragmatists are 89% more likely to take nature-based trips compared to urban trips

Urban Spaces. I feel anxious about crowds and being able to social distance

Nature based. I feel safer knowing I can minimize risk in an isolated area

Where will I stay?

Established luxury chains/ luxury hotels

Short-term rentals (inns, B&Bs, home rental)

Beach / Family Resorts

Budget Hotels

How long will I stay?

Extended Stay

Day Trip

Depends on the occasion—but across the board, Prevailers are least likely to make travel only a day trip, and Protectors most likely

For companies that I'm considering, what **changes** have they made to improve **safety**?

How much do I **trust** companies to keep their promises?

How might I remain safe **throughout the journey**?

4.3x

Protectors are 4.3x less likely than Prevailers to stay in beach/ family resorts

How will I get there?

Flight

Rental Car

5x

Overall, 5x more participants perceived airlines to be riskier than rental cars

33%

greater chance of travelers driving to go on vacation

No-regret moves for organizations

Measure and build trust

Trust is the key ingredient for organizations to build relationships with their customers and employees. **Our proprietary HX TrustID™** breaks trust down into four integrated signals: Humanity, Transparency, Capability, and Reliability. To build trust, organizations can act to build processes, infrastructure, or systems that strengthen these signals. Here's an example of how Capability can shape customers' belief in an organization's means to meet expectations:

Car rental, rideshare, and similar mobility customers are 7.7x more likely to repeat purchase from a brand they believe is Capable over competitors, and hotel customers are 5.9x more likely¹¹

And another example of how Reliability can shape customers' belief in an organization's ability to deliver upon promises made:

Airline customers are 4.4x more likely to buy from a brand they believe is Reliable over competitors, and restaurant customers are 3.1x more likely¹²

Communicate safety measures up front and personal

Dynamically respond to changing news and information. Proactively communicate **new safety measures and protocols**, such as a hotel cleanliness certification from a trusted authority; dialed-up control, where customers and employees can clean their own spaces; and heightened transparency through upfront, visual depictions clearly articulating the tangible changes to the experience.¹³

As summarized in *Figure D*, all clusters look for visible signals of safety, but the effect on likelihood to stay at a hotel is more pronounced for Protectors and Pragmatists.

Ensure flexibility

Recognizing that customers are wary about the future, some companies have updated policies to offer more flexibility with booking changes and cancellations. Demonstrating grace when plans change shows empathy for the uncertain situation and relieves some pressure around deciding to travel.

83% of participants said they are very likely to book with airlines that have no-fee cancellation and change policies¹⁴

👏 My new routine [will] be obtaining the cancellation policy for every activity, hotel, restaurant—anything I'm planning to do on this trip. I would get travel insurance in case anything fell through."¹⁵

— Katie, 29, Dallas, TX (Protector)

PREPARE

Getting ready for takeoff

Calendars have been blocked and reservations have been made—now what? Constant fears for personal safety have amplified and extended the preparation mindset. Prior to COVID, the Prepare phase was typically a lull in company communications. Now, travelers appreciate when organizations proactively address pre-travel anxiety by reinforcing messages from Discover and personalizing communications based on individual preferences, which can increase travelers' sense of control and self-sufficiency.

Keeping customers informed: "What can I expect?"

For Ricky, a Prevailer retail associate from Denver, CO, the sheer volume of communications he continuously received from a hotel chain was enough to affirm his confidence in an upcoming trip: "I get all these emails [from travel companies]; I feel like I'm being bombarded with [information]...so I feel comfortable

Figure D

% of respondents who believe these measures are a must-have or would make them more likely to stay in a hotel

		Protectors	Pragmatists	Prevailers
Heightened Transparency	Shows enhancements to sanitizing and housekeeping procedures	91%	88%	66%
Dialed-up control	Provides a complimentary packet of disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer upon arrival	88%	86%	66%
New Safety Measures	Has a safety/cleanliness certification from a government agency	84%	84%	58%

[going] because I'm hearing it everywhere."¹⁶ Organizations can demonstrate the ongoing safety monitoring that travelers need by continuously updating their digital channels with the latest information in plain language, as well as proactively sharing updates through other communications.

Help customers plan ahead: "Did anyone pack extra wipes?"

While customers expect organizations to install visible signs of safety, 85% still want control of cleaning and look to companies to provide sanitation items. As an example, the majority of travelers would feel more comfortable if a company provided complimentary sanitizing wipes for flying (80%), staying a hotel (79%), or renting a car (62%).¹⁷

To increase self-sufficiency, some customers will pack personal food and other leisure goods to avoid any unnecessary interactions on their trip. Amy, a Pragmatist businesswoman shares, "We will not be purchasing food at the airport. [We] will be packing everything with us."¹⁸ To assure travelers like Amy, organizations can communicate availability of pre-packaged food, cleaning supplies, and contactless in-flight entertainment.

No-regret moves for organizations

Advance Contactless Alternatives

Prior to arrival, provide digital enhancements and alternatives to physical touchpoints from the Engage phase. Airlines can extend the existing 24-hour check-in window to give customers additional time to complete "to-dos" before heading to the airport, and car rental companies can invest in an early check-in and contactless branch experience.

50% Over 50% of customers want contactless rental car pickup and returns, and 24% want this to be permanent¹⁹

Communicate Safety Upgrades

Especially during COVID, safety is a baseline expectation of the travel industry. In order to go above and beyond, companies should demonstrate an adaptiveness and vigilance towards the evolving pandemic situation. Support individuals' need for agency by proactively communicating new enhancements to safety policies and procedures specific to the trip and destination—and continue to provide updates of decisive follow-through.

41% of hotel customers want to receive emails outlining cleaning protocols and practices²⁰

62% of frontline hotel employees want a daily report of cleaning activities²¹

Provide Sanitation Items for Individual Use

Provide security objects to customers and employees alike—and proactively communicate which objects will be available, since many customers and employees want control over their own sanitation.

44% of customers prefer being provided their own cleaning supplies upon hotel check-in and foregoing daily housekeeping services²²

ENGAGE

Choosing to participate

The preparation doesn't stop once customers arrive at their destination. As customers navigate new social dynamics of checking in to a hotel, boarding a flight, and eating at a restaurant, they are constantly prepared to respond to safety threats and watching to make sure organizations deliver on promises made in earlier phases.

The Engage phase is also when frontline employees and customers interact in-person for the first time—and when both navigate a new tension between customer service and safety.

Deliver what was promised: "Did they do what they said they would?"

Travelers will critically evaluate whether communicated changes meet reality—*Are flights really operating at half capacity? Are the restaurant servers all wearing masks? When was the last time this hotel gym was disinfected?*—and will look specifically for visible signals as evidence (tangible signs are important to 85% of customers, and 83% of employees).²³

The airline industry has been on the forefront of testing different measures—from mask requirements to flight capacity restrictions. 81% of customers said that blocked middle seats would make them more likely to fly the airline, and 78% said the same about employees wearing masks and gloves.²⁴ Delta Air Lines recently announced that it would be blocking middle seats, recognizing that these safety protocols and visible signals were more important for fostering customer loyalty and trust over maximizing flight capacity.

Travelers expressed skepticism toward the cleanliness habits of strangers, especially in places with high volumes of travelers:

🗣️ **Everyone...has gone on a plane and someone has been coughing or sneezing. You're all in this environment for a certain time that you know you could get sick as well. So that's a little terrifying [now with COVID].**²⁵

— Saeed, 32, Little Neck, NY (Pragmatist)

Like Saeed, 64% of Protectors and Pragmatists cited the ability to distance from others in their top three most important safety measures, followed by 51% of Prevailers. This fractured trust among customers extends to employees as well—70% of participants would want temperature checks for employees, but only 53% would want the same practice for themselves.²⁶

Overall, frequent business fliers are more forgiving than more casual fliers. When asked about how they would feel if their preferred airline did not require employees and passengers to wear masks, only 37% of business fliers said that they would be much less likely to fly with the company, compared to 59% for the general population.²⁷ We're also seeing these seasoned road-warriors willing to adapt to new safety norms: 74% of frequent fliers are willing to clean tray tables and seats before exiting the plane as a precaution for others, compared to 61% of the general passenger population.²⁸ When introducing new guidelines, companies can expect their loyalist customers to champion these measures for fellow travelers.

What it's like on the other side (the employee perspective): "Is it safe to come back to work?"

Frontline employees are struggling to balance COVID vs. pre-COVID customer expectations. Phyllis, a Protector flight attendant who worked throughout the pandemic, conveys this struggle:

☞☞ We don't do full service because we try not to be in contact with each other, so a lot of the service that [customers] are used to has been cut. [They] just don't get it...They have to understand it's not my rules—they will yell at us like it is, but they're not. These are rules we have to follow as well."²⁹

— Phyllis, 56, Newark, NJ (Protector)
Flight attendant who worked through pandemic

Phyllis's struggle represents a larger challenge that employees across the travel and hospitality industry have as the new unofficial enforcers of pandemic guidelines. Employers should alleviate this burden as much as possible by over-communicating safety procedures to customers in the Prepare phase and by meeting employees' protection and training needs. 71% of airline and hotel employees believe that company-supplied PPE is very important, and 64% believe the same for employee health and wellness training³⁰. Supporting employees has positive externalities for customers as well: 82% of customers prefer organizations that take extra steps to ensure safety and well-being of employees.³¹

No-Regret Moves for Organizations

Build trust in shared spaces

Reimagine restaurants and shared hotel spaces—such as gyms and lobbies—with new infrastructure, modular setups, and processes that support collective safety while maintaining personalized human connection.

83%

of employees state that limiting physical interaction with customers is somewhat or very important in order to return to work³²

Reset customer (and workforce) expectations

Display visual reminders on-site to level-set customer expectations and empower employees to balance meeting service expectations with personal safety. Revamp in-flight videos to highlight mask requirements, display signage outlining waitstaff responsibilities, or draw area markers throughout hotel lobbies and elevators, which can help reinforce and normalize these new social dynamics.

☞☞ I would love for [airlines] to do what grocery stores do with a huge reminder: "Please Social Distance, Wash Your Hands"—either on the intercom, or on [a card] at each seat, or in the [in-flight] video...whatever it takes. Grown adults have to be reminded during a pandemic."³³

— Evan Q, 42, Chicago, IL (Pragmatist)

Ready, jet set, go

So, when will our world feel big again? Travel lets us spend time with family, build careers and businesses, enjoy vacations, and explore new places. As the landscape shifts away from business travel and more towards leisure, organizations are challenged to meet diverse human needs as individuals begin branching out of their pandemic comfort zone in search of travel experiences. To inspire a return to travel, organizations can build trust with customers from the beginning to end of their journey, ensure their safety at every stage, and still deliver on the value of connection that travel uniquely offers.

Organizations have the opportunity to reimagine the customer journey, accounting for the nuances and implications for different types of individuals. Personalized guidance and assistance will be critical to ensure that Prevailers, Protectors, and Pragmatists across leisure and business travelers feel equally and adequately cared for as their varied behaviors and preferences evolve.

By understanding the shifting values of customers and employees, particularly with respect to changing needs for safety and connection, organizations can focus on cultivating trust to secure brand loyalty. Transparent, proactive communications will be imperative in the Discover and Prepare phases to ensure that travelers feel empowered and secure. Then, organizations need to deliver on the promises of the prior phases to create a safe and positive Engage experience. By crafting a thoughtful and dynamic approach to COVID now, travel and hospitality organizations can help us find our next normal, where we can stay safe while creating many memories of a life well-traveled.

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End notes

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