

These Events Would Have Received More Attention, If Not for the Coronavirus pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic didn't just hurt the business sector, it also eclipsed important issues that should have been top priority. As 2020 draws to a close, CEOs tell us what this year's headlines should really have been

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In 2020, many things that should have happened, didn't. You know, the coronavirus. But some of things did happen; they just didn't get the attention they deserved. With 2020 drawing to a close, we brought some CEOs together to tell us what we've lost – or, more precisely, what we don't quite realize we've gained.

Ilan Wagner, CEO of Onward Israel, the Umbrella Organization for International Gap Year Programs and Student Internships in Israel

Ilan Wagner

Long months of a global pandemic and closed skies have naturally created a sense of the world itself being closed, and focused each country's attention on its domestic affairs. But that's not what's really going on. Opportunities that were once obscured by more "important" or "urgent" matters are now taking center stage. Here and there, we can even glimpse the world that awaits us once the coronavirus era has passed: normalization between Israel and some of the Sunni Arab states, new tax treaties between Israel and Australia, the groundbreaking RCEP agreement (a free trade agreement between 20 Asian countries – not, however, including the US and India), and the US election results that will strengthen existing alliances and reinforce international agreements. Beyond that, the coronavirus vaccines and preparations for their dissemination are highlighting the importance of international relations and the global nature of our existence.

Like the savvy stock market investor who buys shares in times of recession, when their value is low, we need to look beyond the immediate term, with faith that in the world of tomorrow, globalization trends will actually intensify and spread. Now is actually the time to invest in broadening Israel's relations with the world – business, cultural, and

interpersonal relations. We need to strongly emphasize professionalism, and a deep understanding of the new rules in each field of endeavor.

It's true that these relationships are currently being forged and actualized mainly on the virtual plane, due to understandable restrictions, but today's online relationship will evolve into a more diverse, alive, and meaningful relationship tomorrow. Now is the time for Israel to invest in promoting international relationships at all levels: diplomatic relations, scientific and cultural collaboration, international research projects, and business/employment relationships between Israeli companies and the rest of the world. The willingness of Israeli companies to hire foreign interns in frameworks that incorporate remote work, is a major advantage in terms of bolstering the Israeli economy's ties to the wider world, and preparing for the post-coronavirus era. Onward Israel, the umbrella organization for international gap year programs and student internships in Israel, is working toward that end.

Right now the skies are closed, and our attention is naturally focused on the virus and the damage it has caused. But the world itself is not closed; it is still opening up and waiting for us just around the corner.