

WHAT LESSONS ARE WE LEARNING FROM THESE STRANGE TIMES THAT PREPARE US FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK?

Think back to February 2019: then it would have been hard to imagine that in a few weeks most of us would be working from home, that schools and colleges would be shut and that we wouldn't be able to pop to our local pubs or restaurants whenever we fancied. Some of us have been in lock down for a few weeks, others for much longer. For those of us who are able to work from home: how are we adapting? What are some of the opportunities this new virtual world is presenting us? What lessons can we learn and take forward?

Putting health first. Isn't it refreshing to realise that when people ask, how are you? they really mean it. These days it's not just another hello before conducting business. Most calls and meetings and emails end with keep safe and well. This human priority of health puts everything in perspective. We have truly seen how precious and fragile our well being is. The organisations that really absorb this and continue to prioritise physical and mental health whilst they respond to the virus strategically and economically are the organisations people will want to work for in the future.

A level playing field. Regardless of location, or job level, now everyone is joining meetings virtually. We no longer have to facilitate meetings to accommodate those who are physically in the room and those who are calling in. Those physically in the room used to have the advantage of seeing documents ahead of time and were more visible. Sometimes that meant they were more influential to the decision. But now, everyone is virtual and in some ways that's been a great equalizer. We are now co-creating documents virtually, working through agendas virtually, even having client meetings and new business pitches virtually. We have been talking for years about how global teams can work better together, have we now cracked it? Does this present an opportunity for all teams to be inclusive? How can we preserve this level playing field when we head back to the office?

Getting our ideas heard: Virtual meeting tools have come a long way. With the tools we have now, instead of raising our hands or our voices to put our ideas forward. We can now chat virtually or have our video window light up when we speak - there are lots of ways for people to have their say and with a great chair there is no reason why everyone's ideas cannot be heard or contributed. We will be fitter. If you believe the funny videos being sent around to lift our spirits, we'll all come out of this period fatter. With no commute, no travel time, and no gyms and instead being able to go out of the front door for one exercise outing a day, it's easy to think we'll all become lazy. But for those of us who have the privilege of going out for regular exercise, this outing has become something we really value and look forward to. Even for those of us who are just using our spare rooms to attend online classes or to lift some weights - people are making time to exercise. I believe the value we are all placing on exercise will make us fitter. We have learned the benefits of physical exercise for enhancing mood, productivity and ideas first hand. How can we preserve this commitment to our physical health when we all go back to work?

Using our technology to show our human selves. It's now etiquette to use the cameras instead of a blank screen with your name and as we continue to work from home, we are seeing each other's houses. Seeing personal pictures, artefacts on displays from travels, books, mess etc. We are meeting pets, children, husband, wives, partners. All this new information means we know more about our colleagues, and that is starting different conversations - some that we may never have had before. How can we encourage each other to keep seeing each other like this?

As leaders, more than ever we need our teams to deliver their best work and come up with different ideas to survive and grow. And yet, even in this challenging time, there are opportunities: our new way of working is taking away some barriers. Let's take advantage of that and think about how we can carry what we learn into whatever comes next. Let's also remember that new barriers will come, but that we have the ability to be nimble, and recognise them early and do something about them! If we can continue to get our work done at such a time, the sky really is the limit.