

The background features a complex network of thin white lines forming a web-like structure. Overlaid on this are several large, semi-transparent triangles in shades of purple, blue, and orange. A bright, glowing light trail in yellow and orange curves across the lower-left portion of the image. The overall color palette is a gradient from deep blue at the top to dark purple at the bottom, with a bright orange and yellow glow on the left side.

Events and Hospitality The Post COVID Future

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Background

It is widely reported that the events industry alone is a circa \$2.5Trillion industry, employing some 26Million people. And hospitality not far behind, reported as being worth circa \$1.8Trillion in 2019.

However as we entered 2020, with all the promise of potential 11% INCREASE in these 2 sectors. Somewhere within Wuhan, China a virus was soon to not only interrupt this, but quickly become the front page news of our generation.

On 30 January 2020 the outbreak was declared a "Public Health Emergency of Global Concern" and quickly communities across the globe began to react as this virus gathered both pace and ferocity.

By 11/12 March 2020 the World Health Authority had declared COVID-19 as an International Pandemic. The Events and Hospitality Industries have been some of the first and hardest to be hit, as many had already begun to postpone / cancel events, delay travel, and 'self-isolate'.

However, as many countries began to 'lockdown' preventing any un-essential travel, social distancing became widespread, and both industries, so reliant on footfall fell almost silent.

Within this document, I share my own observations as an international professional working within these industries, along with a prior career as a Rapid Deployment Soldier within the British Army, and an education that specialises in Psychology, Sociology and Human Behaviour.

All details shared are my own opinion, but gleaned from both my experience, education and extensive research into both crisis management, and human behaviour.

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Somewhere in China people were getting sick in unusual numbers. Then press reports started appearing. Large numbers of people were getting seriously ill along main transport axes. News of deaths soon followed. In a few months 60,000 people would die before the disease came under control. This was not Wuhan in December 2019 and January 2020; it was north-eastern China from late 1910 to early 1911 and what was to become known as The Manchurian Plague.

A little over 100 years later, Organisations like the World Economic Forum have had pandemic on their lists of top global risks for a long time, so no one should really claim to be surprised by this. Whilst the government is speeding through countless amendments, suspensions, modifications and new legislations to support a country in crisis, there are things we can do also.

The answer doesn't lie with Private Frazer and his immortal line from the BBC Sitcom *Dad's Army* "We're all doomed" although judging by the amount of panic buying we have witnessed for the past few weeks you may believe otherwise!

So perhaps, rather than fights in the aisles of supermarkets, we should look to understand WHY?

Fear is a powerful and primitive human emotion. It alerts us to the presence of danger,

and it was critical in keeping our ancestors alive. Fear can be divided into two responses: biochemical and emotional. The biochemical response is universal, while the emotional response is highly individual.

Biochemical Response

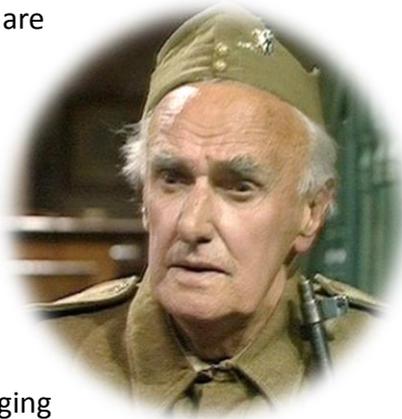
Fear is a natural emotion and a survival mechanism. When we confront a perceived threat, our bodies respond in specific ways. Physical reactions to fear include sweating, increased heart rate, and high adrenaline levels that make us extremely alert.

This physical response is also known as the "fight or flight" response, in which your body prepares itself to either enter combat or run away. This biochemical reaction is likely an evolutionary development. It's an automatic response that is crucial to our survival.

Emotional Response

The emotional response to fear is highly personalized. Because fear involves some of the same chemical reactions in our brains that positive emotions like happiness and excitement do, feeling fear under certain circumstances can be seen as fun, like when you watch scary movies.

Some people are adrenaline junkies, thriving on extreme sports and other fear-inducing thrill situations. Others have a negative reaction to the feeling of fear, avoiding fear-inducing situations at all costs. Although the physical reaction is the same, fear may be perceived as either positive or negative, depending on the person.



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Acknowledging this to be a NATURAL response to UN-NATURAL circumstance, is the first step to us making a conscious decision to determine if this emotion serves us well?

In this case, determining not, we need to establish how else to respond if not fear?

Fight or flight

I consider myself to be exceptionally fortunate in this regard. Having previously served Queen and Country for over 12 years in the British Army. Not only as a rapid deployed combat medic, but also qualified in Nuclear, Biological, Chemical & Radioactive Warfare Medicine (Stay with me here, and don't read into this other than my past experience).

I spent a number of years on exercise and in training, rehearsing for numerous scenarios, including that of a pandemic! And so, whilst there is MUCH in the way of uncertainty and concern, I tend to find I operate far better in these scenarios and so, simply 'put my beret back on' (metaphorically speaking at least) and return to what we've been taught.

Survive to Fight

It was 1984 when David Kolb, shared his theories regarding the 4 stages of consciousness:

1. Unconscious Incompetence

We Don't know, what we don't know

2. Conscious competence

We know realise we don't know

3. Conscious competence

We now learn, so that we then know

4. Unconscious competence

Having learnt, and now knowing, we tend to do without thinking!

And here lies the first problem. It can be argued this is a CYCLE, as getting to the 4th and final stage of competence, often leads to people making mistakes, errors occurring, and what might be considered as complacency. You see, Kolb was right, by NOT thinking, simply doing, we revert back to unconscious incompetence, even if a little less incompetent than before!

We must learn to remain in the 3rd level of consciousness – Conscious competence. And by doing so, remaining present, aware and vigilant.

As leaders, we must be forever conscious of our consciousness, and not allow ANY of our decisions to be 'natural'. I think we must consider that there is no 'natural' any longer. Anyone who keeps "waiting to go back to normal" is simply still in denial. The OLD normal is gone! We can't unlearn what we have learnt, (and this is good) Therefore the remainder of this document shall be looking FORWARD to a NEW NORMAL! – POST LOCKDOWN, POST COVID!

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ALL CHANGE

Very few people actually like and embrace change. Change brings about uncertainty, and with it doubt and for some FEAR. However, change is inevitable.

“ *The ONLY constant in life is after all CHANGE!* ”
Heraclitus

There are (according to Robinson and his work studying Change Management) 5 Stages to change:

1. Awareness of the need to change – In order facilitate change, we have to first acknowledge the need to do so. In this occurrence, this has been brought about by actions beyond our control, and so this is for the most (some are still hankering onto numerous conspiracy theories, in the naivety this is some global government plot to manage our lives and the virus doesn't exist!!!!)
2. Desire to participate and support the change – Once we have an AWARENESS we have to ACCEPT and be willing TO change. There are still many “waiting for this to be over so we can go BACK to things the way they USED to be!”
3. Knowledge about how to change (e.g. necessary skills and information) – This is where we have reached at the time of writing this. We are learning HOW to change, how to Adapt, “Pivot” to the ‘NEW’ normal!
4. Ability to implement new skills and behaviours (e.g. obstacles to enacting the new behaviours, from cultural to legal to organisational should be removed so the person can do it) – EVERYTHING is having to be reviewed to determine does the OLD way of doing things transition into the NEW way of doing things? Or are there hurdles we must overcome in order to do so? We've seen an extraordinary amount of legislation already be reviewed and either created, amended or suspended, in attempt to facilitate this change.
5. Reinforcement to keep the change in place – POST lockdown will be the big test for this. There are still many who want things to GO BACK to normal. And the simple fact is, whilst the world continues to revolve on its axis around the sun, we are on THIS path! There is no ‘going back’ (Trust me, if there was, I'd probably learn to listen more to some of my teachers at school!) We are where we are, and so we need to accept that. This is where the FSNP model is of interest!

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4 Behavioural Stages of Change

Now we understand the stages of change, we need to spend just a little time looking at Human Behaviour and the natural reaction to change.

It was Tuckman in 1095 who first shared his theories on the 4 stages of change. In his research this was whilst studying teams and team performance. However, whilst this is crucial information for internally when working with employee's. This model to a lesser degree can still be effectively applied to both communities large and small.

FSNP



FORM

Whenever we face change, the first thing that has to happen is for change to occur.

STORM

MANY don't like change, and so are objectional, unwilling, and voice their frustration, insisting on going back to normal.

NORM

Eventually, (and only because of item 5 above 'Reinforcement to keep the change in place') Acceptance, that the change is here to stay, and then becomes a 'new' norm.

PERFORM

Now, we will see the community begin to perform in the new environment.

As a soldier, we can often be presented with environments where there is simply NO TIME to allow teams to STORM and NORM. Life and death can rest on moving immediately from CHANGE to PERFORM. And when there is a VERY dedicated, responsive and trusted leadership team in place, this can happen within seconds! - Moving from CHANGE to PERFORM.

However, the moment the pressure, the hurdle, the circumstances have abated and things can begin to 'relax'. The NATURAL response to change is FSNP, and so it is more than probably that at least some affected by the change will revert to STORM and have to work through this and NORM before they return to PERFORM. Our role here as leaders, is to acknowledge and accept this, and manage people THROUGH the stages rather than thinking we can skip over them!

Events / Hospitality Industry

At the time of writing this we enter the second month of the Covid 19 crises. There remains a lot of talk within the events industry which has homed in on the need for diversification by way of virtual events and meetings. Perhaps understandably so given that the live events industry has come to an almost complete standstill. However, are we placing too much emphasis on the need for companies to diversify into the virtual sphere once we finally reach the daylight at the end of this unprecedented tunnel?

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It's hard to comprehend that the worldwide lockdown and subsequent shutting down of the global events industry, is one that is going to permanently change the landscape of live events and meetings.

Sure, there will always be a need for virtual events but can they ever really replace the buzz, creativity and sheer vibrancy of a live event?...

“ *It Is Not the Strongest of the Species that Survives but the Most Adaptable* ”
Charles Darwin

Certainly the CURRENT position, there is a dramatic increase in the demand and use of digital technologies to deliver solutions. And recognizing that people learn and retain best through Visual, Audio AND Kinesthetic means is key here to developing a truly immersive digital experience, to replace the lack of environmental stimulus created at physical event.

I do see an increased move towards both AR and VR by some in recognition of this. And whilst many Micro/SME businesses may think this is “Just for the big / National/International Agencies” I think we shall also see far more open, collaborative / Cooperative working both short and Mid-term.

“ *Your enemies enemy, becomes your ally* ”
Gabriel Manigault

It is certainly my belief (and that of MANY others) that once the dust has settled and the post COVID 19 landscape starts to become clearer, the need for audience engagement and face to face interaction will be more prevalent than ever.

Live video conferencing platforms like Zoom are fantastic and offer an invaluable service, not only at times of lockdown, but also during periods of normality and stability. Being able to connect immediately and hold meetings remotely is something which has and will continue to grow in importance as technologies & societies continue to advance. There is no doubting that an online meeting can be as if not more efficient. Take the collaboration between UCL and the Mercedes Formula 1 team who together successfully developed a new breathing aid to help patients suffering with COVID 19 in unfathomably quick time. A project which took just 100 hours, (largely consisting of online meetings) from initial meeting to production of the first device. Something which no doubt would have taken weeks if not months in the pre COVID world.

However, the virtual meeting space can never sufficiently replicate the experiences gained from attending a live event, nor does it claim to do so. As humans we love interacting with people both in person and to an extent physically. (The debate on whether we shall ever shake hands again shall go on for some time I'm sure). Live events provide an unrivalled platform for networking with potential clients and discovering new technologies. The buzz of a

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busy exhibition and the thrill of discovering and trying out a new technology live is not something we can achieve on a laptop or computer at home or in our offices. Being present in a meeting space with like-minded people, sharing ideas, trends, networking and socialising is integral to the continued growth of one of the most important industries on the globe.

Do live events need to change?

Yes almost certainly, the way we interact with each other, not just in the event industry but in society as a whole, will no doubt be changed forever. Not necessarily in a negative way though. Being more aware of people's personal space, respecting boundaries and generally being kinder to one another can be no bad thing. We will all be more aware of our own surroundings and everybody's health and personal wellbeing which can only act as an advantage to us all as we move forward.

Meetings, learning, seeing, experiencing are all crucial in the growth of this industry and our understanding of new technologies and ways to do business. Virtual meetings have a huge part to play in this, but so do live events, and when the dust has settled on the COVID 19 health crisis, there will no doubt be an unquenchable thirst for live events. Once again, this industry will be there to meet the demands, delivering more vibrant, diverse and exciting events than ever before.

3 Phase Attack

In order therefore to both survive the current crisis, and plan for a productive future, it is best to break this crisis into 3 phases:



Lockdown

Across the world, more people are currently directly affected by COVID 19 than are not! Billions of people are unable to carry out their usual daily lives without significant impact caused by the virus, and the events / hospitality industries are at the spearhead of industries impacted by this.

MANY of the world industry leaders in both these environments are talking of this having an 18-24Month impact on the industry and the way we trade. Despite the best financial planning and forecasting I'm not sure there are many with 2 years of reserves, able to simply 'sit tight' and wait for this to be over! We MUST find a means of operating IN this environment, and that does mean quickly embracing technology, finding means to either diversify or 'pivot' to deliver through an alternative medium.

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IMMEDIATELY Post Lockdown

As stated above, there IS going to be a prolonged period of relaxing the lockdown, possible a shorter period of further lockdown's dependent mainly on human behaviour post lockdown and the appreciation this is not OVER. Social distancing is going to be here for a long time, whilst work continues on a vaccine, and more than 60% of the population are tested and if required vaccinated against this!

Therefore smaller meetings and events MAY begin to become permitted again with STRICT rules around social distancing, and so it may well be that those who can offer COVID 19 tests, and develop a set of rules to minimize the risk, and provide an environment suitable for these to take place, could quickly see a rise in demand.

Certainly, even during the crisis, we have seen a number of the most wealthy in the world, centralise their families in otherwise closed luxury hotels and after a deep clean create COVID FREE environments!

The Future

Those who adapt have an exceptional opportunity to come through this, more resilient, better known and trusted by the clients and even more in demand (as those who don't sadly make it through the crisis and fold).

A combination of physical and digital event experiences, enabling people to satisfy their NEED for engagement, interaction, learning and

development whilst more aware of and sympathetic to people's concerns and protective of their space. Social distancing IS going to be here for a while, but those who are willing to accept and protect this are the one with whom will move from survive to thrive.

Conclusion

“ *Survive to Fight,
not Fight to Survive* ”
British Army

I'm EXCEPTIONALLY fortunate, that for the first 12 years of my working life, I choose to give to Queen and country as a Rapid Deployment Advanced Trauma Medic. I've deployed on operational commitments across the Globe, and witnessed firsthand the immense impact of enforced change has to both countries and their people.

One of the biggest learnings I have taken from my time within the Military, into my post military career, which is of particular importance right now, is this phrase we were taught over and over again throughout Basic Training.

Survive to fight, not Fight Survive is first and foremost a mindset shift, from one of victim to one of victor.

“ *No plan, survives first
contact with the enemy* ”
Field Marshal Helmuth Karl von Moltke

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It doesn't matter how much we may have contingency planning within our business, hardly ANYONE in the world had given sufficient consideration to the impact a worldwide Pandemic such as this would have not only on their business, but on the world economy!

Therefore, it's first important to move past BLAME! Forgive my 'French' here, but the simple fact is, from time to time "Sh*t happens" and it's NOT about BLAME but ACCEPTANCE! The fact is, whether we like it or not, this thing is REAL, it's HERE and its NOW.

Dash, Down, Crawl

The IMMEDIATE action when coming under enemy fire, is to Dash towards a place of immediate safety, get down behind that safety, and crawl into a position capable of delivering suppressive fire AGAINST the enemy.

The first 2,3 possibly for some 4 weeks of Lockdown has been THIS phase. Getting cover, assessing the situation, and holding the line. However, THIS is where it all changes. From here on in, there will be those who Thrive, those who Survive and those who Fall.

It's NOW time to begin taking the fight back to the enemy. Getting back on the FRONT foot and continuing the advance. During Lockdown, it may well not be possible to commit to a frontal assault (Business as usual). It may well be necessary to 'Left or Right flank' (Diversify) It might be that we have to hold the ground and call in Air Support 'Pivot' or 'Collaborate'. But one way or another, the Mission remains the

same, its merely the environment we have to adapt to!

Improvise, Adapt and Overcome!

As Darwin alluded to in the previous quote, survival is NOT about being the biggest or the strongest, but the quickest to adapt. In this sense, it is far EASIER for a micro/SME to adapt quickly, and therefore make good ground ahead of some of the larger National and International Businesses who are already so entrenched in process and procedure, it become more difficult to pivot quickly.

What 'Others' Are Saying...

The changing face of events, the response of industry as a whole and the support of global governments have been revealed as key themes in how the industry recovers from the impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

A recent survey of almost 2,000 people from agencies, corporates, associations, hotels and suppliers mentioned looking after people, working in partnership with clients and taking time to recover properly are key to how the industry will recover.

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EVENTS

Many event planners have spoken about the changing face of events in response to the crisis.

“Everyone will be more prepared with insurance and contract clauses in future” one event planner said.

“We will have better infrastructure to run virtual events and make them more interactive and closer to a real event, rather than just someone talking over slides until we are able to run live events again.”

Another said that *“Governments should have a plan in place for both the events and hospitality industry.”*

One event planner added: *“There needs to be clearer communication on [governmental recovery] timescales so people have confidence in future event planning.”*

“There needs to be financial support for affected businesses, larger interest-free 100% backed loans -spread over several years. There also needs to be grants for keeping people in employment in the industry as well as freelancer support.”

Comment: Frankly, this is concerning and suggests people are still within the STORM phase of behavioural change! We have to quickly move past blame, and looking externally to what help and support THEY should provide, and move to a point of what can WE do to survive and thrive.

THE INDUSTRY

Event professionals shared their thoughts in the survey, about how the industry needs to pull together to recover.

“I think we all need to stick together and be as flexible as possible” one event planner said.

“The industry will recover but it will be a while until we see the surge in events coming back in. I think there will be a big move to online and digital and that trend may stay for some time”

Another said: *“We need a more collective approach and cooperative support base. This is an opportunity to enforce stronger regulations when it comes to tender pitch stage”*

Comment: This is slightly more comforting, and seeing people in acceptance, and seeking ways to work together in order to survive.

The most common themes in responses to the corona questionnaire asking how the industry can recover:

SUPPORT

Governmental support to shield the events industry from the economic impact of the coronavirus was a recurring theme throughout the responses to the survey.

“We need government support particularly for SMEs who rely on commissions/payments for events and hotel bookings” one event planner said.

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"If you do not pay business rates there is no relief but we still have to pay staff. Redundancies are inevitable to protect the future of our business"

Another said *"The event industry needs governments to be clear and decisive in its message and instruction. The event industry does not need half-baked decisions that cause confusion as it's leading to a lack of clarity as to what can continue"*

"The events industry needs our clients to look forward beyond coronavirus and to keep on planning, things will get back to normal so we should be planning for that"

"We will recover by working together and supporting each other" another planner said.

"Yes, events have to be postponed or cancelled but we must work together to ensure each party (organiser/supplier) survives and is not financially penalised for the gain of the other party"

"Keep in touch with your stakeholders and be honest with communication, this is going to end eventually and we will be back doing business, so do not burn any bridges"

Another added *"If there's one positive outcome from this virus it will be that the world needs to change our way of life. Looking after the environment, our animals/wildlife and our people need to be the number one priority. Returning to the 'same as before' shouldn't be on the table"*

"The events industry will need to change and really push to support, nurture and protect our planet, not simply encourage brands/businesses to continually profit as a result of pillaging, abusing and taking everything they can get as cheaply as possible from the earth"

Comment: Whilst there are a number of mixed messages here, fundamentally they are NOT that positive, still seeking help from governments rather than learning to adapt and overcome. There are encouraging observations that working more collaboratively, cooperatively we can achieve success, and a need to change the way we operate as industries anyway to be more observant to our planet and the environmental impact the OLD industry had!

BUSINESS

"My main concern is how the business can recover?" one event planner said.

"From September/October onwards can we strive to get our business levels back up and increase our occupancy? Will guests prefer UK travel to international travel?"

Another planner said: *"Hotels need to acknowledge that this is a 'force majeure' event. They want us (clients) to reschedule to impossible dates. It's bad business"*

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Another added *"For the next year, all the hospitality suppliers should offer attractive prices so they can ask for more and more events"*

Comment: Most of these responses concern me. YES, things are pretty dire right now, and financially crippling for many businesses. However, we only have to look at EVERY other recession and downturn in the market, to see, reducing prices is NOT the way to exit a recession but a means of prolonging one! We BUY our way out of a recession and DISCOUNT our way into one! YES, we have to be more PRICE SENSATIVE in terms of margin, and NOT expect whoever books in the next 12 months to 'cover the bill' for all that has been lost in loss of trade throughout 2020. This IS going to take years to recover from, and those who accept that and build their future business accordingly will be the ones who come out of this on the other side far better positioned in terms of clients and opportunities.

PEOPLE

"We need a global campaign assuring people of safety, but it will take a long time as the economy will be crushed after this" one event planner said. *"Too many small businesses - hotels - restaurant workers will be bankrupted"*

Another added *"It can only recover with time. Virtual events are a good stop-gap, but events are about sharing an experience with people - it has been since the first Neanderthals gathered around the campfire - they are an essential part of human society so will come back - but will be changed"*

Another said *"I work as a freelancer and life is going to be very hard. I feel that the events industry needs to lead the way and consult with the government to see what can be done to make people feel safe and get events going again"*

Comment: It will be collaboration and cooperation that gets us through this, and NOT blame or awaiting insurance or government grant! Yes, BOTH if these are required, and most welcome, but they are not the answer, there are only PART of the answer.

TIME

"There is literally nothing we can do or say necessarily, it's just about customer confidence in the state of the world" said one event planner.

"This will take time and with that will come back the confidence that events can go ahead"

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Another said: *"It will take time and will only happen once people are confident in holding large gatherings once again. My company is an entertainment provider and so we need face-to-face networking events and parties to be possible"*

"For this to happen we possibly need venues to look at reducing the maximum number of guests allowed to attend events so that social distancing can be observed in these initial months post coronavirus"

"Hopefully that would help restore some confidence in the events industry and the value of events"

Another added *"We need to change our schedules. Look to hold events at different times during the year, to spread the events in times where perhaps there were peaks and troughs"*

"There are too many lumped into seasonal activity. Give time to regroup and think about online activities that would provide face-to-face online meetings in a similar format"

"This could be split up rather than a big event. List the topics that were in the event and split out into new topics, specific for each webinar event"

Comment: I'm pleased to see people are recognizing this is a LONGER term impact than simply Lockdown, and giving consideration to a more sustained recovery than BUSINESS AS USUAL.

Conclusion

The Business of Business is BUSINESS! And on average \$5Trillion is traded internationally EVERY SINGLE DAY!

Yes, Hospitality and Events have been particularly badly hit by this worldwide pandemic, and sadly, there will be casualties (not only the 203K people worldwide who (at the time of writing) have died as a result of Corona)) but also businesses with whom have been unable to sustain themselves through the lockdown, or pivot successfully to a new way of working.

Not only will this have a direct impact on those working within these businesses, but a significant 'knock on' impact to their suppliers also.

So what are YOU doing to: Survive to Fight, NOT Fight to Survive.

In this sense, we have to "Do what we need to do" to survive, SO that we can continue the fight! And NOT "Give in, give up" and await to be overcome by the battle! Adapt and overcome was a frequent instruction, which was tested and exercised multiple times to enable us to continually think differently. And fortunately for me, since leaving the Military have been able to forge a career as a professional speaker sharing this and HOW to apply it to many others also.

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My thanks for taking the time to download and read these, MY thoughts on the COVID crisis. I'd LOVE to hear your thoughts, so PLEASE drop me a message either on the website or via email.

I remain OPEN for business, be that physically (When it is again permitted) or digitally, and keen to continue my work in supporting Business Leaders and their companies to THINK differently.

If you know of others who may benefit from this document, you have my FULL permission to share it with them, that they may also have the opportunity of an alternate viewpoint to this.

Every Corps and Regiment within the Army has a motto, (often taken from Ancient Latin) My Corps motto is: **InArdius Fidelius** – *Faithful through Adversity!*

Let me know HOW best I can be of service to you?

I may not wear the uniform any longer, but I shall always remain OF SERVICE.

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