
The Art Of Smart: More Critical Than Ever

By David Mellor, CEO, Crowe Global

Making smarter decisions that create lasting value is hard for leaders in a world of constant change and accelerated evolution – Crowe is here to help

Welcome to the latest edition of Crowe's The Art of Smart, which has – fittingly – pivoted from previous versions. This suite of multimedia thought leadership is designed to interest, inform and inspire fellow business leaders, and help us make smarter decisions that, ultimately, create lasting value.

Three years ago, the inaugural, downloadable report's centerpiece was an index that ranked global corporate decision-making. Sweden's Atlas Copco and Volvo Group tied for the first position in 2018, according to the methodology, which is founded on four pillars: growth, diversity, boldness and innovation.

While those four metrics remain in place for this year's The Art of Smart, the recent acceleration of trends and the need for greater agility and flexibility in a world of constant change is reflected in the content's presentation.



The index has been set aside for this edition, though we still feature boundary-pushing organizations that are thriving. In the coming weeks, on The Art of Smart's revamped website hub, we will publish insightful articles that address challenges leaders face now and in the near future.

Following the epochal events of 2020, The Art of Smart is more essential today than ever before. Most organizations and leaders – including me – have struggled with new challenges and different forms of decision-making in the past year. We have had to make more choices – some of which hadn't been contemplated before the coronavirus crisis – and make them faster.

Coping with constant change

Since last March, with only my partner and dog for company, working from home has forced me to reflect on my role as a global CEO. My job description states that I will spend the majority of my time overseas – meeting current and prospective Crowe members, and speaking to large audiences at various events.

My responsibilities have not altered, but how I perform them has changed fundamentally. Consider that I have not attended a single in-person meeting in a year. Like many leaders, I initially struggled to adapt to at-home working and, out of necessity, learnt new skills.

To appear more professional when delivering a presentation to 300 delegates via videoconferencing technology, I hastily upgraded my camera, lighting equipment and replaced a rusty ladder from the shed with a professional tripod. Below the camera, and jacket and tie, I often wore shorts.

How leaders present themselves has evolved considerably in the last year. This change is partly because of the rise of videoconferencing and working from home, but also because people – employees and other stakeholders – look to us for guidance, support and empathy in these uncertain times.

The threat of COVID-19 hit home for me early on in the pandemic, when a partner in Crowe's UK firm, a man only in his 50s, died from the virus. I had been involved in interviewing and hiring him, and his passing deeply touched me. It's one thing to deal with business disruption, but quite another when someone you know is no longer with you.

New tools and skills

How does a leader communicate appropriately – about work and life, as the two overlap more than before – without seeming insincere and false? It is a skill that involves the ability to open up to your colleagues to demonstrate that we are all equally fallible and vulnerable in these very difficult times, to reveal more of our souls than before.

As a leader, I look to lead by example and not by telling people what to do. Taking the time to understand what excites and energizes my colleagues builds stronger relationships, generates fun-filled conversations, and aligns business purpose.

I am incredibly passionate about tomorrow's workforce, one of the six main themes of this year's The Art of Smart. I sense that we are at the start of a revolution, and this area, including the role of offices and cities, will develop dramatically in the next two decades.

The Black Lives Matter movement's power has been felt around the globe, which is why I am proud Crowe has long championed diversity and inclusion. The benefits of diversity are manifold. At a base level, it is vital, with the skills gap widening, to expand the talent pool.

Business leaders must consider other factors that have been elevated in the last year as well, such as achieving sustainability with profitability and the risk management of cybersecurity – two core themes explored in The Art of Smart.

As a leader who has always been a champion of change, both professionally and personally, the future greatly excites me. It will be fascinating to see which bold choices made by leaders pay off in the coming years.

Finally, I sincerely hope you enjoy The Art of Smart and find that the content enables and empowers you to make smarter decisions. We don't have all the answers, but we want to drive business-critical conversations – I urge you to please join in with the discussions.

Crowe Global is a leading international network of separate and independent accounting and consulting firms that are licensed to use "Crowe" in connection with the provision of professional services to their clients. Crowe Global itself is a non-practicing entity and does not provide professional services to clients. Services are provided by the member firms. Crowe Global and its member firms are not agents of, and do not obligate, one another and are not liable for one another's acts or omissions.

© 2021 Crowe Global