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# Leader Lessons From The Pandemic: The Power of Good Communication

**Are you ready for the “new normal” and to conduct “business as unusual”? Decision-makers offer their most important advice from their 2020 experiences**

Crowe Global’s Art of Smart content is founded upon four pillars of success in decision-making: growth, diversity, boldness and innovation. It aims to help business leaders make smarter decisions. When the COVID-19 chaos hit, it impacted every organization in the

world to some degree. Some leaders were well prepared to make smart decisions and pivot, or to re-write business plans; others were not.

We asked decision-makers from all over the globe, and across a variety of industries, to share their honest and insightful learnings from 2020. Here are their selected answers. They will hopefully serve as lessons to heed for fellow business leaders looking to make smarter decisions that have lasting value.

## **Business as unusual is possible through good, honest communication**

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### **Honor Wilson-Fletcher, Chief Executive Officer, British Exploring Society:**



“I wanted us to earn support and credit through being a part of the solution to the difficulties of lockdown, and a positive voice,” says Honor Wilson-Fletcher, Chief Executive Officer of the British Exploring Society, a youth development charity founded on the belief that challenging experiences can transform lives and empower young people.

“To do that we had to act quickly, cancel projects, undertake work we had never done before, learn new skills rapidly, ask for help from many people – all with no guarantees of success. Our supporters were excited by our drive and innovation and enthusiastically endorsed our new plans. Our small team now has new capabilities and confidence – and a greater understanding of how to tackle challenges. Our board

is also more confident about endorsing innovation and in our capacity to deal with crises. It’s been business as unusual.

“Communicating well and honestly has been a priority for us in 2020. If we changed our plans and left key people behind, we risked fragmenting our wide community of stakeholders, which is where much of our value is invested. We needed to ‘bring everyone with us’ during the bumpy ride. Putting together an internal communications plan may seem an obvious step to many leaders, but we’re a small team with no dedicated communications staff. I am so glad we invested time in this early on; we felt supported and endorsed throughout the toughest months of the year.”

## Watertight communication and covering skill gaps are critical

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### Will Skinner, Chief Executive Officer, UFIT Singapore:



“I would summarize 2020 as being like doing an MBA in three months,” says former professional rugby player Will Skinner, who is now Chief Executive Officer at UFIT Singapore, a fitness community. “I had some big gaps in my skill set that were exposed and I had to move fast to learn; now I have to find the ones that weren’t exposed before getting caught out again.

“For example, I had to reassess how I communicate to stakeholders. Finding new ways of communicating, being selective with timing, and, most importantly, being cognizant of the fact not everyone thinks in the same way as you do was very relevant.

“It was a big challenge to deal with team nervousness; we have over 100 staff, many of whom are from overseas. Not only did we all have to support each other emotionally during lockdown with team members worried about their families, but job and industry volatility caused a huge amount of speculation and hearsay within the team. Again this is where our communication had to be watertight.”

*The Art of Smart research from 2019 advised that having “a robust communications strategy right from the start is vital, both to navigate regulatory requirements, and to help companies make a strong case so they can attract the funding (or acquirer) they are looking for.”*

## Offer clients and employees clarity in chaotic times

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### Ann Lathrop, Chief Marketing Officer, Crowe LLP (USA):



“For a marketing organization we normally have to think about clients and prospecting, but in a pandemic not many people are going to change their service provider, so, overnight, we focused primarily on our customers, to make sure we were taking good care of them,” says Ann Lathrop, Chief Marketing Officer for Crowe LLP in the US. “We started a weekly digest and sent it out to clients, and, through that, we tried to create clarity with where we are going when the rest of the world was in chaos. That was 100 per cent the most important thing.

“Also, when you give your team a ‘north star’ of what they’re supposed to be doing they can create great work in the middle of adversity. People were shut in their homes and we have produced some of our best ever work.”

## Being forced to reflect on business models has evolved them – for the better – and don’t be afraid of change

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### Mark Baer, CEO-Elect, Crowe LLP (USA):



“The coronavirus fallout forced us to reflect on our business models,” says Mark Baer, CEO-Elect at Crowe LLP. “We thought we were innovative as a firm. Then all of a sudden, when the world changed, it wasn’t possible to go back to how it was in the past. We’ve evolved in terms of our business models. We have seen foundational change in that area for the better.

“But change is never easy. You could come up with many reasons why you shouldn’t change or evolve. My advice is: be bold, don’t be afraid of change. There are different ways of doing things.”