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# Leader Lessons From The Pandemic: Empowering Remote-Working Employees

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.

## **Remote working is effective – but risks have to be better managed**

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**Cephas Osoro, Head of Commercial Services, Crowe Erastus (Kenya):**



“I never thought that working remotely would work in my country,” says Kenya-based Cephas Osoro, Partner and Head of Commercial Services at Crowe Erastus. “I have been skeptical about people having the personal discipline to work efficiently from home. If you are able to measure the performance of your staff members, then you don’t have to keep on checking on them. I enjoyed working from home and actually spent more hours than in the office. I also realize that you do not have to have in-person meetings, which is a blessing when you consider the traffic in Nairobi.

“Your response to risks is critical in managing problems, though. We would not have been at this level of the pandemic had the early warnings of the presence of COVID-19 been taken seriously. Global leaders needed to have taken some action in November or December of 2019. Early warnings of a significant problem need to be addressed as quickly as possible and neutralized. This is what we accountants would refer to as risk management.”

## Leaders must be empathetic, open-minded and positive

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### David Morel, CEO, Tiger Recruitment:



“At the start of the pandemic, we set up our 50-strong team to work from home almost overnight and then, four months later, we successfully brought them back to the office,” says David Morel, Chief Executive Officer of Tiger Recruitment, a boutique recruitment firm headquartered in London, with additional offices in New York and Dubai.

“Working from home hasn’t been a smooth transition for everyone, which I’ll factor in to any long-term decision about remote working. My decision-making is guided by

facts and data. This is something I learnt from the 2008 financial crash and it has stood me in good stead. It’s easy to panic and give in to fear and emotion, especially when you’re having to make decisions much more quickly than normal about a future that’s largely uncertain.

“Leaders have had to become more empathetic and be better able than ever to balance the needs of the business with the needs of employees. My natural optimism has been put to the test like never before. However, I’ve learnt that I can find the positives even in the most challenging circumstances. I think that recognizing the seriousness of the COVID-19 situation while offering hope has helped me to keep my team motivated.”

## An exam like never before

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### Nigel Bostock, Chief Executive, Crowe UK:



“As business leaders, we constantly experience unexpected events,” says Nigel Bostock, Chief Executive, Crowe UK. “Taking Europe for example, recent years have seen a gradual increase in ‘business as unusual’ in the middle of economic, political and Brexit uncertainty. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has delivered an immediate, significant and unprecedented multiplier to the ‘business as unusual’ equation. The crisis has been a test like never before and an exam we all have had no option but to participate in.

"My focus has been to ensure that we look after our people and clients while protecting the financial resilience of our business. My fellow partners and I asked ourselves recently what we have done positively in the crisis and we pointed to many factors including faster and more effective decision-making; the way we embrace technology; looking after our people and clients; changing working practices; increased collaboration; our ability to innovate, create, adapt and evolve; removing barriers to change; enhanced, continuous and effective communication.

"We have seen great leadership, trust in each other, resilience, drive, dedication, empathy and strength across our talented team at Crowe; all while continuing to deliver to our clients, look after each other and demonstrate their potential in everything they do. It is a proud and humbling experience to lead such a great team, but we are not complacent; there are more challenges ahead and we continue to focus on passing the next test."

## **Remote working opens the door to home-life reality – and drives compassionate leadership**

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**Pesh Framjee, Global Head of Non-Profits, Crowe UK:**



"As we moved from focusing on the safety of staff and setting up remote working to longer-term lockdowns, we had to understand that these events impacted different people in different ways," says UK-based Pesh Framjee, Global Head of Non Profits at Crowe. "I'm sitting here in my study – I've got a room, I've got a good place to work. However, many of our staff are in shared accommodation or have kids to look after – how do they make it work? It's made me much more aware about the well-being of our teams. Whereas before people came into the office and we had mostly discussed work, now we're

thinking about how we can help in other ways – how do we keep them motivated, how do we engage with them as a team? Virtual drinks and Christmas parties help, but there is much more to do; we need to understand their challenges and different circumstances and what we need to do to respond."

# Uncertainty is the new certainty – we have to change together

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**Steven Strammello, Chief Risk Officer, Crowe LLP (USA):**



“It’s really easy to focus on policies and procedures when hit with a crisis, but what can’t be ignored is that human lives have changed,” says Steven Strammello, Chief Risk Officer at Crowe LLP. “It’s important to help human beings through the change because everyone reacts differently. Some embrace it and some resist it.

“As time has gone on, the fatigue has set in for everyone. It has been a task managing the fatigue of our people, who say, ‘It’s been 10 months, I want to get back to normal.’ Frequent communication from the heart from leaders is

absolutely key. That lets people know we’re in this together. It is my job to ensure we provide a healthy and safe environment for employees. And we mustn’t force something on people that they are uncomfortable with, like going to meet a client. That creates strain in the organization. You can’t ignore the mental health aspect.

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