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Coaching Teams . Changing Cultures

A message for CEOs about COVID-19 FOG

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The global news in February showed us an ever-increasing stream of information around Coronavirus, but it seemed like something that was a million miles away and unlikely to impact us.

The 4th March was when we first heard the news that schools across the UAE would be closing. **Shock** started to set in as we felt sorry for teachers and parents who needed to change their holidays or figure out childcare solutions.

Almost simultaneously, I jumped to the **denial stage**. Although it was okay to protect children, businesses would continue to operate as normal. Social media was over exaggerating the impact. We just needed to be more sensible and get on with our lives.

On the 8th of March (just four days later) we received a notification from the KHDA outlining that all training events needed to be ceased and switched to online or virtual solutions, and by this point, I was just plain **angry**. Clients were ringing and canceling teambuilding events and training days, and over a million dirhams of confirmed business was disappearing before my eyes in a matter of days.

I didn't stay in the **Angry** stage for long. I know that lashing out and blaming others is not wise and after reaching out to friendly competitors, I saw that we were all in the same boat.

Depression then settled in, but at that point, I didn't realise it. That's what I now call my **COVID-19 fog**. I literally couldn't see a way through. I'd work on an idea but couldn't stay focused for long. I jumped between tasks, leaving at the end of a long day feeling like I'd achieved zero. For those that know me, I'm a hugely energetic person, I have a quick answer for most things and love a problem to solve. But I didn't know how to solve this problem. I literally needed to find some space to feel low and have my own 'pity party' to come to terms with what was changing. I watched too much Sky News and read way too many social media posts from experts, all with differing opinions.

What I did do right was to keep communicating with my leadership team, and I relied on their thinking and clarity for steps we could take moving forwards. They were amazing, and each worked on specific projects to move forwards.



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Our new Head of People & Culture (started 1st March —now that is a baptism of fire) quickly became the first responder in a crisis, the hero of action. Working closely with each line manager, she came up with a plan on how we could keep all Bizzers employed, whilst tightening our belts so everyone could take some of the strain to reduce costs. Remote working and other solutions are also being deployed.

Our Learning Delivery team pivoted to learn Virtual Instructor-Led Training (VILT) – with platforms purchased, and upskilling completed. We leveraged our international partner content and had solutions ready to go in 5 days, which is something in previous times that would have taken us weeks.

Marketing was first out the gate with messaging and options, with everyone pulling together to learn, experiment and align.

Their experimenting pulled me along the change curve and the fog started to clear a little. I wouldn't say we are out of the woods just yet, and our short-term plans of managing over the next 30-60 days will then need to give way to longer-term rebuilding our overall business plans. But I can see a way forward and I'm learning just how amazing the Biz team is. I will probably oscillate between the experiment and decision stages for a while, before everything becomes the new normal.

I wanted to share this, as fellow CEO's might be feeling the pressure and overwhelmed because of COVID-19, and struggling to find the get-up and go needed to tackle everything head-on.

You do need your teams and those around you to help. Talk about where you are on the Kubler-Ross Change Curve. Figure out how to move through to the next stage. It's a learning curve and a change for us all.

Stay safe.

Hazel Jackson

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