

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Through the smell of hand sanitiser and a facemask ...

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I have just returned from my first face-to-face delivery since February 2020. Yes, actual people together in the same room. Admittedly with fewer numbers and many Zooming in from around the world thanks to Covid but nevertheless, the differences between virtual and in-person deliveries have never been more stark to me.

Don't misunderstand me – the swift and efficient pivot to virtual delivery, especially experiential, was long overdue. After a collective hiatus (part panic, part pivot, part reaction), it was full-team-ahead on whatever your favourite platform is. We're still learning and adapting but the transformation & journey has been incredible.

HOWEVER, having been back in a classroom, the differences are more obvious to me and make me realise what has become accepted as normal.

Energy – and connection – matter...

First and foremost, it's the energy – that of the learners and the facilitation team. It could be felt from everyone and by everyone, at the risk of a cliché ... fizzing! Perhaps we could call it connection - being able to read the room and look people in the eye; to hear and respond to questions, reacting in the moment and grasping the challenges in understanding, comprehension, and insights. Maybe it's the excitement everyone experienced when doing something strangely novel and familiar all at the same time.

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...and difference is good

I also think that it allowed for a different and better experience. It certainly allowed for interpersonal connection and networking. Time will tell how it has been received, and the impact. For me, I feel invigorated.

Heightened empathy & understanding

Change has come in the form of patience & awareness ...and buckets of it! By this I mean awareness of personal space, of how we interact now when face to face; patience for and by those who must be virtual - the inevitable tech glitches and for the added difficulties reading of body language or being unable to be in the moment. We've all walked a mile in those shoes and I was struck by how much we've learned and developed as a result.

Much less is taken for granted – for now

The final noticeable element is the gratitude & enthusiasm of those attending. No longer a prisoner to learning perhaps! Maybe it was always there, hidden by the need to multitask and support 'work' when away on what is often perceived as a luxury – to be learning with others again. The people I met were grateful (to colleagues and each other) to be present – the effort, the energy, the insight all noticeable and appreciated by the team.

The business has evolved

This was just a snapshot. Time will tell where we end up. In my opinion leadership & executive development, learning, training (although I hate the word, let's leave it here for now) has evolved 10-years or so in the last 18-months. The tech available is great and significant now – all of this was overdue and hugely helpful. Let's keep evolving and developing.

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I believe that as the world opens back up and Covid becomes endemic, rather than the pandemic, we will see a hybrid model evolve – we only do face-to-face what we have to do face-to-face. This means that we use technology to support and improve what we do, ensuring that what we do when together maximises our learning, interactions, connectivity, networking and (almost most importantly) practice new skills.

The lessons from our lessons

A final thought as we return from purely virtual to wherever we end up, we have to learn from our recent and not-so-recent past.

- Trust and assume positive intent
- Listen and question
- Ditch what hasn't worked – technique and technical
- Maximise our capabilities for the best outcomes
- We've learned to listen differently – we need to capitalise and develop this
- Make it human; keep it humane – listen, react, support, involve and evolve
- Appreciate the effort – it takes a lot from all sides, so much happens
- Keep being human and grateful

There is so much still to learn and evolve in what is done and how we do it, let's collaborate and harness the power of what we've all been forced to do in such a short period of time.

What changes have you observed in learning and development these past two years? I'd love to hear your insights

Jonathan Besser is Managing Consultant at Intrepid Leadership Consulting limited, a leadership development company that partners collaboratively with individuals and organisations to address current and future needs. All views expressed in this article are the author's own. Discussion, comments and feedback are welcome and invited.

