

**2020:**

The Year That Changed Everything

Presentation to APMP's "BPC Global"
online conference

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In early 2003, a couple of years into my time with Strategic Proposals, I flew out to Hong Kong for a week's work with clients. Before leaving, I'd seen reports of a strange new virus that was starting to cause concern. Nothing to worry about, I thought.

I went to my first appointment on the Monday morning. Emerged. Switched on my phone, and it suddenly lit up with text messages and missed calls galore. My entire diary for the week had been cleared as companies locked down and banned outsiders from visiting their offices. Training courses, meetings, cancelled en masse. Thanks to SARS.

With nothing in my diary, and my travel expenses covered, I had a brilliant week's holiday – oblivious to the virus raging around. 800 people died. And I had a great vacation. Looking back, now, in 2020, you can imagine I feel a bit guilty.

some businesses and their people. Meanwhile other organisations have never had it so good — meaning their staff have been stretched to their absolute limits to meet soaring client demands.

Many have been challenged to find the right life / work balance — especially, perhaps, those with very young kids, or those attempting to help with the maths homework.

Many have battled with mental health and wellbeing. When we asked bid people in the UK in

How are you personally feeling right now?

They use the phrase “20/20” to mean “perfect vision”, and this year's crisis has certainly brought a lot of things into sharp focus. For those who love neologisms – new words entering the common language – this will be remembered as the year of “furlough”, “self-isolation”, “social distancing”. “Covid”. “Coronavirus”.

The year started so brightly: I chaired a big event in February at London's Royal Society of Arts, called “Proposals 2020”. Upbeat, filled with optimism. If only we'd known. I gave the opening presentation at the inaugural Bid & Proposal Con Europe in Amsterdam in March — days before Europe started to go into lockdown.

Since then, it's been a tough year for so many. People have been thrust into different ways of working — or not working: furloughed, losing or worried about their jobs, seeing earnings cut. The pandemic has been catastrophic for

the summer to rate “How are you personally feeling right now” on a scale from 0 – 100, one in twelve scored themselves below 20. Many more gave ratings of under 50: more down than up. There are a lot of colleagues out there in our profession who have been, who are, really struggling.

One of the most worrying impacts has been on diversity. A US study led by Lean In, in partnership with McKinsey, reported at the end of September that “women — especially of colour” “have been particularly negatively impacted” by the pandemic. As a result:

“1 in 4 women are contemplating what many would have considered unthinkable less than a year ago: downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce.”

They added: “This is an emergency for corporate America”.

And that's even before you get to people who've lost those dear to them. Those who've suffered themselves from the virus. Those who've cared for loved ones, or who've not been able to spend time with elderly relatives thanks to lockdown: one of our survey respondents reported that the toughest thing has been “Talking through windows”. I'd thought pandemics were something from the history books.

I'm not aiming to offer a definitive blueprint for the brave new world. If I had all the answers, I'd be running for President. Or, actually, I might stay out of that one right now!

Think of it more as cuttings from my scrapbook of observations.

What do I see as some of the challenges those of us in our profession now face, as a result of this year of unprecedented change? What do I see the most successful teams and people doing?

Let's dive in!

Talking through windows

The latest view I've read, in a McKinsey report presenting planning assumptions to CEOs, is that “the epidemiological end point is most likely to be in the third or fourth quarter of 2021” — merely with “the *potential* to normalise sooner”. So many unknowns: when will a reliable vaccine appear? Will a reliable vaccine appear? Will there be a third wave? Hopefully not a “wave goodbye”?

So many variables, too: different continents, different countries, different towns and cities are all at different stages of their escape from the worst of the virus, or their plunge back into it.

Our current state — for many, wobbling along, with uncertainty looming, buffeted by the latest political decrees — is going to be with us for many more months. And as we emerge from that, with our newfound “herd immunity”: will it be to an era of rapid economic recovery, or quite the opposite?

And how long will it be before the next virus shows up: is Covid-22 lurking around the corner? I think I've depressed myself. I hope I haven't depressed you. Because here's the thing: as a profession, as individuals within this profession, we've done amazing things this year, to adapt to this strange and unexpected new — ‘normal’?

“The epidemiological end point is most likely to be in the third or fourth quarter of 2021”

Being really brilliant with whatever tech your organisation's adopted will differentiate the best bid and proposal specialists from the merely mundane.

#BeMoreNerd

From virtual virgins to a zest for zoom: this year's seen so many of us thrust into a world of online collaboration tools. It'll be one of those things that people discuss when dinner parties become a thing again: "What did you use during the crisis?" Were you a Webex-expert? A Zoom-ista? A Teams-star?

Now I wouldn't exactly describe myself as a luddite. I was an early BlackBerry adopter. I tweeted something like 10,000 times over 10 years, before I decided I need to get some of my life back. I blogged: some of you may recall The Proposal Guys™, which I ran with my dear friend BJ Lownie until LinkedIn took over as the way the business world interacts. More recently, with the help of

my colleague and fellow APMP Fellow Kat Wyon, we've quickly discovered great ways to make online courses really interactive.

But ask me to run a strategy session, a final document review, using (say) Teams? Goodness, it'd be clunky for all concerned. I've attended so many very ordinary virtual meetings in recent months. And yet I've participated enthusiastically in some such sessions done so well, by colleagues and clients, unlocking real creativity and collaboration.

So here's the thing: being really brilliant with whatever tech your organisation's adopted will differentiate the best bid and proposal specialists from the merely mundane.

I haven't read a user manual in years: I'm beginning to think I should actually take a class.

At least I've already mastered the most important skill: keeping a smart shirt on a hanger on my office door, ready to replace the T-shirt for important online meetings!

Oh, and by the way, while we're talking systems — and working from home, potentially surrounded by housemates. Security, anyone?

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#LoveMyCat

Here's Tillie, one of our two wonderful Maine Coon cats. If you've been on a call with me this year, you'll have met her: she's taken up daytime residence in the space between my keyboard and my monitor. So far, she's sat through our online APMP Foundation course seven times: I'm convinced she must by now be ready to sit the exam.

You know, if a year ago, my cat had come purring or meowing her way into the middle of a meeting, people would have frowned at the utter unprofessionalism of it. Now, they look forward to her appearance.

My favourite song by Depeche Mode, one of the bands I loved in the '80s, was called "People Are People". It feels like we've all recognised that, at last, in our professional lives.

To quote my good friend Nigel Dennis of BidWrite, APMP Fellow and the leading light of our profession "down under":

"We've been introduced to partners we didn't know, animals we didn't know existed and little humans with chocolate smeared over their face! That is all just great and builds stronger connections."

I mentioned my colleague BJ, who founded our company 33 years ago. He's long been a passionate advocate of understanding your team members as people, not merely as job titles. What motivates them? How do they work best? What can you do, running a proposal, to help them to deliver the best possible contributions? And that, more than ever, matters in this different working environment.

...little humans with chocolate smeared over their face...

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#PickUpThePhone

Let's go more low-tech for a moment...

When APMP refreshed the Foundation Level syllabus a few years back, a new section popped up on the list of competencies: "Virtual Teams". Now this has always been an area of particular interest to me: I've run sessions on it at various APMP conferences. The very first bid centre I set up, back in 1999, managed and won some truly global deals: I particularly remember one bid where the team spanned colleagues in Houston, Melbourne and the UK.

Now, in the slides for this new "Virtual Teams" competency, there was one phrase that sometimes provoked laughter: "Don't forget you can always

pick up the phone." It seemed somehow patronising, simplistic, obvious.

Now? It seems rather profound. Because: want to chat to your boss? Schedule a session on Teams. Want to catch up with a colleague? Put a virtual coffee in the diary. Need to speak to someone senior? Submit a written request for a Zoom meeting, rather than catching them in the cafeteria.

And that's when you know you want to speak to someone. Some of the most magical, motivating conversations I've had at work have been those water cooler moments with people you didn't even know you needed to talk to. As the wonderful Janneke Orriens, one of the directors of

Don't forget you can always pick up the phone.



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our Dutch business, commented: "Formal meetings never were and — under Covid, often aren't — the most effective way of communicating."

Yet in the current world, as McKinsey put it in a recent article: "Serendipitous interactions no longer occur".

You know, when I've been running Foundation classes recently, "don't forget you can pick up the phone" has increasingly seemed like one of the most important lines of the whole course. We need to make sure that physical distance doesn't equate to personal distance too.

We need to work at spontaneity.



Think Marie Kondo when you're putting together the invite list

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#FindYourGroove



For many in our profession, "virtual is business as usual". It's been the preferred *modus operandi* of many of my own team for years. Take my writers, my designers. Being around *people in an office* would be a distraction. Some prefer silence. Others can't work without classical music or heavy metal blaring in the background. They looked on with some bemusement as the rest of the world packed up the contents of their office desks and panicked.

But for many in our profession, it's been incredibly disorientating. Home office? The kitchen table, if you're lucky. The working day? Well, you're sure not arriving at a set time after your commute.

Folks don't drop by asking if you fancy a coffee. Teammates don't wander off to lunch together. There's not a "going home time". They say "rhythm is a dancer"; we've lost the beat of our daily dance.

As one of my clients observed on a call recently: "I'm finding it more exhausting."

Personally, having worked in more than 35 countries, I miss the travel too. Watching "Emily in Paris" on Netflix without being able to visit Paris? Just — weird.

So here's the thing.

When you're working virtually, you need to work out the right way to work.

You need to find ways to be kind to yourself. It's OK to have your shower before you switch on your PC. To take the time to go for a walk, a coffee. To "plan a fake meeting for your lunch break" so you're not expected to be on Zoom, as someone commented very insightfully in one of our surveys. To suddenly

change your plans when your flatmate upstairs turns the volume to full blast on their latest favourite playlist. To remind your organisation that "working at home" doesn't mean "always on".

As author Cynthia Spraggs commented in the quirkily titled "How To Work From Home And Actually Get Sh*t Done": it's OK to "protest pointless meetings". And if you're the one organising them: "Think Marie Kondo when you're putting together the invite list."

And while we're on the subject: where do you want to work anyway? As Professor Yossi Sherri of MIT commented in his quite brilliant new book "(Ab)Normal": there may be no need for us to be "tethered to the city" — as cities themselves face up to the prospect of what he termed "The Great Emptying Out".

#InPersonBrilliance

Five days a week in the office, with the occasional opportunity to work from home? It's not going to be like that moving forward.

Will it be 2 — 3? Two days a week in the office, three at home? 3 — 2? All at home, save for particular dates when we need to come together? I'm sure it'll vary from team to team.

Here's Nigel Dennis again —

"In Perth (where I am), we were in lock down for only about six weeks. So things are now, for all intents and purposes, back to "normal". (We have had no community transmission for months.)

The one exception is that we are still embracing on-line technology and working from home. People realise that both can lead to greater efficiency and freeing up time, so they're here to stay."

One other great aspect of virtual working is that it should enable us to draw on the best people in the company, not just on your buddies from the same floor of the same office:

True subject matter experts, not merely subject matter enthusiasts.

Working out ways to leverage that organisation-wide talent pool is one of the great opportunities here.

But I'm going to insist that there are some activities in the proposal process that really are best done face-to-face. The team-building stuff. The strategy stuff. The storyboarding stuff. Very probably, some reviews. We can replicate — parody? — the experience as best we can online, but there's no real substitute for "real" meetings that unlock winning ideas when a group freewheels together within a great structured process.

So here's the challenge. How do we optimise the mix? And if time in the office is precious, not a given: how do we use it brilliantly?

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If time in the office is precious, not a given: how do we use it brilliantly?

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#TrustThroughProposals

I've long argued that people buy from people they know, like and trust. Nigel Hudson, another APMP Professional and one of the most insightful people I know, commented on one of my posts recently that, these days, it may be more like:

"People buy from people they know, like and... *have never met?*"

The Harvard Business Review once observed that "Trust needs touch." And to quote Yossi Sheffi of MIT again: "There is still no substitute for personal contact when it comes to building business relationships, and this is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future."

So let's play this out. By the time it comes to writing a proposal in the olden days — by which I mean up to March — I'd have hoped and expected that the salespeople and solution team would have spent good, quality time with the client over a period of months. That they'd have built great rapport with the key stakeholders. That they'd talked, of course, but more importantly listened — and if you've read Kate Murphy's wonderful "You're Not Listening", you'll realise how hard that is to do well *face-to-face*, never mind remotely. I want my proposal to be sown onto fertile ground.

Now? You're not going to get near the client's office! Stranger danger! Unclean! Even if the client's in the office in the first place: they'll more likely be working from home, and probably won't invite vendors round to their front room for a cup of tea.

And the ability to form strong bonds with people online? Well, I'm told it works with Tinder: I'm not sure it's so true in the world of business development.

So no matter how good your sales colleagues get at online prospecting and online meetings, we'll be faced when writing the proposal with a trust deficit. And how do we deal with weaknesses? We mitigate, counter, address, downplay. Your proposals are going to need a whole lot more about the team who've designed the proposition that's so beautifully articulated in your document. To breathe life into their skills, experience and approach. The process they've gone through. The debates, decisions that have to led to you being confident that you're putting forward the best possible offer.

They'll need more, too, about the team that'll work with the client once selected: their background, their style, what makes them tick. Quotes and anecdotes. Making the two-dimensional feel real. Breathing life into the names on the page.

And they'll need to address how you'll go about building real rapport with the client's delivery team, especially if much of that has to be done remotely.

Think proposals circa 2019. But with a human touch.

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#DesperateTimes

Of course, if you haven't had the chance to build rapport with the client and to gain true insight, there's a strong argument you shouldn't be bidding in the first place. And if you're not the incumbent, facing barriers to implementing change on the ground thanks to the health considerations currently in play, it's not looking altogether promising either.

Nor is it good business to strike deals with bad businesses — those so affected by what's happened that they may not survive to pay the bills, despite all the good intentions in their RFP. *That* has to play more of a factor than it would have done in the rosy climate of 2019.

As my friend and colleague Richard Buijs of Strategic

Proposals NL puts it: from a strategy perspective, it's not just about the three Cs of customer, capability and competition anymore:

“There's a fourth C that you can use to be distinctive: Coronavirus.”

Now some of the older, or shall I say “more seasoned”, amongst us will have worked, will have led bid and proposal teams, through the last recession. And what happens if there's a macroeconomic downturn? Clients have less money to spend. They spend it on necessities not niceties. Debates move towards cost retrenchment and reduction. Volumes go down. And salespeople get more

desperate. It's the old scenario explained by BJ: that if they happened to stumble across a copy of an RFP lying on the side of the road, they'd dust it off and probably want to bid. Tough targets. Limited opportunities. “Hey, let's chase anything that moves.”

Great qualification is *always* critical. It's even more so in straightened times. Don't waste your ever-more precious hours chasing lost causes. My fellow SP director Lorraine Baird nailed it in an internal discussion on Yammer recently:

“The most successful people will be qualifying, qualifying and qualifying again!!!”



The most successful people will be qualifying, qualifying and qualifying again!!



8

#Renew

I talked a moment ago about the barriers to change for a client. Do you think your average buyer right now is jumping with joy at the prospect of running tendering processes for the contracts that are due to expire in 2021? Of trying to build consensus across their internal stakeholders as to their new requirements, their evaluation criteria, their RFP questions?

At having to co-ordinate an evaluation process remotely, comparing scores and notes across endless online workshops? At having to actually implement change: either trusting that their chosen vendor really can deliver the new solution remotely, or having to put in place the arrangements to bring them safely on-site to do whatever's necessary?

As a former procurement professional, it's not often I feel sorry for those who still work on the dark side — but actually, right now, I almost do.

So might, perhaps, it just suit them better to strike a great deal to extend the contracts of their existing suppliers, nimbly adapted to reflect any changing needs or usage patterns as a result of the pandemic, and to build in more flexibility for the future unexpected?

It simply can't be the case in late 2020 that winning new business is seen as more glamorous than protecting the jobs and revenues associated with existing clients. And I'd argue that **in the current climate, renewal proposals should perhaps be the primary focus for proposal teams.** Let's get off the back foot, let's stop waiting for RFPs to land from clients who'd really rather not have to issue them, and let's get creative.

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#BeReadyForPanic

For all the clients who need to flex business as usual, where a renewal proposal may work, there'll be some for whom the current times simply **aren't** business as usual. Where their business is fighting for its very survival.

So what happens? Any of you been asked for what we might call a “panic proposal”? “Get something to me that would usually take weeks, months — in days.” Stretching your thinking about your solutions and about how quickly you could deliver. Thinking radically about your financial models: if you're the incumbent, whether you're willing (at times) to take a hit or would rather walk away.

If you've not roleplayed what you'd do in those circumstances, I'd be doing that right now. Because when the client's panicking, you don't want to be.

One part of this is pre-written content. As Richard Buijs observed the other day: a key challenge here is the urgent need, if you've not already done so, to “review standard text blocks for the “new normal” and Coronavirus issues — and then “be careful with the words you use when you use them: not everybody will think the same about the situation as you do”.

And, by the way, why not submit a great proactive proposal before the client gets to the panic stage? For clients who need to change quickly, finding flexible and creative new partners could be absolutely critical.

There'll be some for whom the current times simply aren't business as usual.

#WriteSuperbly

Everyone can write. Many bid managers, most proposal managers can turn a phrase. But even in our profession, very few people indeed are truly brilliant wordsmiths. The “art of making subject matter experts sound more eloquent than they ever thought they could be” is a skill indeed.

And I’m going to argue that as we submit more of our content online; submit more varied forms of proposal documents; have less time in which to capture the evaluators’ hearts as well as their minds; potentially see decisions taken on the written proposal without any form of pitch...

...that as we move forward, the skills of the brilliant proposal writer and editor will become even more in demand...

To quote a rather fascinating thread on Twitter two weeks back:

“Documentation is the unspoken superpower of remote teams. The most successful team members remotely will be great writers.”

@chris_herd

The author added: “Tools that enable others to write better will explode”. I think that’s true (if not literally, I hope). Now *must* be a good time to be looking at tools that help sharpen your proposal writing — the likes of PerfectIt, VT Readability and others.

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The skills of the brilliant proposal writer and editor will become even more in demand.

#StepUpDesign

I mentioned earlier that I was honoured back in March to be asked to give the opening speech at the first-ever Bid & Proposal Con Europe.

I talked then about how, back in 2008, SP organised the first ‘award’ in the proposal profession here in the UK — for proposal design. We had lots of entries. By the standards of the day, some of them looked amazing. By the standards of March 2020, they didn’t. As I commented in Amsterdam: “Your proposal looks very 2008” isn’t a compliment.

Fast forward 7.5 months, and I’m going to argue that “Your proposal looks very March 2020” isn’t a compliment, either. Back then, even if you submitted your bid electronically, the evaluators probably printed it to review. Now? You know, they probably don’t have a top-quality colour laser printer nestling under the dining table.

If you’re not given real thought to how you make your proposals more accessible on the screen, you’re falling behind. And it’s not just about the need for radically better, different design for traditional proposal documentation: we’re seeing more and more demand for video, animation, creative ways of having your proposal conversation with the client in a world that’s changed.

As I’ve long argued: “People see what it looks like before they read what it says”. And if your proposal team lacks real cutting-edge design skills — and the ability to execute at proposal speed — your competitors will, by now, be stealing a march on you at every turn.

“Your proposal looks very March 2020” isn’t a compliment

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This time last year, I was in South Africa, presenting at the Annual General Meeting of the flourishing APMP chapter in that quite wonderful country. I had the good fortune to spend a lot of time with the wonderful Larissa Cornelius, Managing Director of nFold — Africa’s leading proposal consultancy. She summed up what’s needed in a great email to me the other day:

Shorter and clear messaging

More engaging content

Better looking content

More creative use of media such as animation and video

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#TheVirtualRoom

If I had a pound for every online session I'd seen this year about online presentations, I'd be a wealthy man. We all get that death by PowerPoint was a nightmare face-to-face; over Teams, it's a calamity.

So I'm not going to dwell on things you'll have heard elsewhere, but I do want to think about two particular challenges of virtual pitching that, to my mind, haven't been discussed enough.


Number 1: we'd long ago moved away from talking about the proposal presentation in terms of slides and scripts, to thinking about what we term "the experience in the room". It was about the move from the evaluators looking at the screen, to them connecting with you in more of a holistic way. Posters to get them standing up. Thought-provoking material in front of them on the table. Or, at times, no collateral at all. So

how do we create a more rounded "experience in the room"

when we're not "in the room"? It's something that takes real thought, but which could create real differentiation.

Number 2: have you ever worked with a bid team that's done their first run-through of the slides in the coffee shop opposite the client's office? Now we're remote?

To quote Larissa Cornelius again — "Virtual pitch sessions are far more unforgiving." So strong rehearsals differentiate the strongest pitch teams, now even more than before.



"Virtual pitch sessions are far more unforgiving."

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#PersonalDevelopment

You know, I run a lot of courses. (Put less kindly: some say I talk too much!) And pretty much every conversation I've ever had with clients shaping training programmes has somewhere featured the phrase "personal development".

Now I adamantly believe that there will always be a crucial place for the magic of the collective face-to-face training experience: you don't win hearts and minds over Zoom.

Over the course of recent months, though, I think the emphasis has started to shift to people taking control of their own destiny when it comes to enhancing their skills. The *personal* is coming to the fore in *personal* development.

There's so much material out there in so many creative formats: so many opportunities to learn. So much of it's free.

And yet, for example, for everyone who's at this fabulous online Bid & Proposal Con, there are twenty or so APMP members who aren't. And that's a crying shame.

Personal development isn't about sitting back and waiting for your organisation to schedule a course, to send you to the next APMP event. It's about taking control of your own destiny.

Setting yourself a budget, a target, a fixed number of hours you're going to invest in your career each year.

If we've learned one thing in 2020, it's that the most successful people out there are actively embracing the chance to learn and improve.

If I can quote Jurgen Klopp, manager of my beloved Liverpool Football Club:

"Dwell on nothing, be in every moment of the contest and show humility in your approach by recognising that you have to work harder than your opponent before you can even think about winning."

#OurCaringCommunity

My career started more than thirty years ago, moving from a leadership charity to a graduate recruitment scheme and then into procurement. And I've said before that I can hardly believe how lucky I am that chance led me eventually to the proposal profession.

Why? Partly because I love what we do. Crafting brilliant documents and pitches. Bringing together fascinating people to help them tell their stories. The variety: every day, week, month a different deal to get immersed in. Winning.

But not only all that: it's because of the people. Ours is a nice profession. For all so many of us compete passionately against one another, we do so invariably with kindness and respect.

And that generosity of spirit has never shone through more so than of late, through countless 2020 initiatives — many hundreds, thousands of hours invested by people in connecting, supporting and helping their fellow professionals.

Ours is a nice profession.

Whether it's APMP UK's wonderful scheme to provide mentoring to those suddenly out of work. BidBites. ThursdayThrongs. Baskar and Ashley's wonderful series of interviews with bid and proposal leaders. Some of the things my own team have done, publicly and privately, of which I'm very proud.

The kindness of so many quiet messages, swapped without fanfare, checking in on bidding friends. "Stay safe", the sign-off to so many emails, has seemed genuinely heartfelt and caring.

Let's not lose that moving forward, as we emerge from the virus. Let's make sure we really focus on continuing to harness our mutual kindness, for the good of one another and of us all.

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#CherishTheGood

When we ran one of our surveys earlier this year, we asked people to reflect on something good that had come from the crisis. I was particularly struck by one of the comments:

I found love during COVID by reconnecting with a colleague from a previous job!

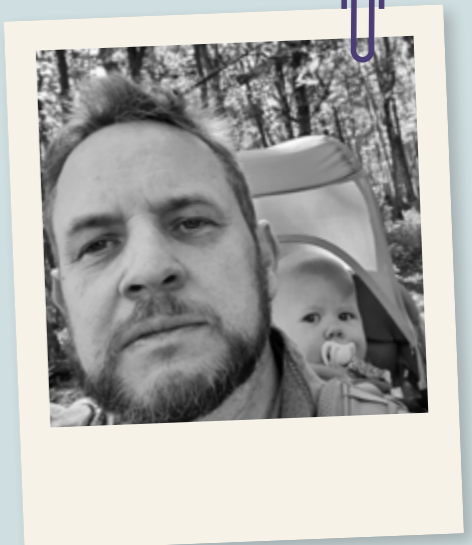
Isn't LinkedIn wonderful?!

In a year that I'd characterise as "running fast to move slightly backwards", I've had things

to cherish to — notably, the chance to spend more time with our daughter Erin, who was 13 months old when we went into lockdown. Seeing her first steps, as she made a lunge for a chocolate biscuit. Walking 35 miles a week with her in her rucksack on my back: precious time together that I'll never forget.

I've pinned a copy of this photo up next to my desk. Whenever it feels tough — say, I'm missing spending time face-to-face with my team, my clients, my fellow APMP members — I can take a couple of moments to focus on the photo.

So: don't lose sight of the good things. Hunt for them if you have to. What would be on your photo, pinned next to your desk? I'd love to know!



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#EmergeStronger

I'm going to leave the final words to a few of those who've responded to our surveys this year. I don't think I can really add much to their perspectives.

- The virus probably marks the end of an era of indulgence. It's going to force smarter working with leaner and more virtual teams.
- Change creates opportunity: we just need to be smart enough to see it and agile enough to exploit it.
- Now is the time put our energy into thinking about next-gen bids & proposals.

"Bids and proposals are fundamentally a competitive activity. Those teams that will thrive in the new world will be those who react quickest to the new ways of working."

Perhaps, for all of us in this profession, it's time to wake up and smell the coffee. Assuming, of course, that you haven't lost your sense of smell to the virus.

And two more comments, from our first survey that have really helped me this year:

- **Focus on the things you can influence.**
- **Hang in there.**

Up the road from me in Bedford, about fifty miles north of London, is a rather wonderful place called the Panacea Museum. It's based in a set of ordinary-looking properties that were occupied by a maverick group of English ladies in the early part of the last century, convinced that the Messiah was going to come to earth in the back garden of one of their homes. The charity that now runs the place still keeps the garden pristine — just in case.

My purpose in presenting this set of vignettes from my coronavirus scrapbook hasn't been to offer some sort of universal "panacea" to all of the challenges that we now face as a result of this year's events. It's been to make observations in the hope that some might provoke new ideas, and others give you the confidence to keep going down paths you're already treading.

Because one thing's for sure: after 2020 — the year that's so unexpectedly changed everything — "business" isn't "as usual".

Thank you so much for listening.

And: stay safe.



- #BeMoreNerd
- #LoveMyCat
- #PickUpThePhone
- #FindYourGroove
- #InPersonBrilliance
- #TrustThroughProposals
- #DesperateTimes
- #Renew
- #BeReadyForPanic
- #WriteSuperbly
- #StepUpDesign
- #TheVirtualRoom
- #PersonalDevelopment
- #OurCaringCommunity
- #CherishTheGood
- #EmergeStronger



Stay safe.



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A graphic of a notepad with a blue pushpin at the top right. The notepad has three lines of text, each preceded by an icon: a Twitter bird for the handle, a mouse cursor for the website, and a hand cursor for another website.

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