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LEADERS IN LOCKDOWN

INSIDE STORIES OF COVID-19 AND THE NEW WORLD OF BUSINESS

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INSIDE STORIES OF COVID-19 AND THE NEW WORLD OF BUSINESS

"This is a call to pause and reset – hopefully to a more inclusive and equitable world in line with planetary boundaries. This book gives hope."

PAUL POLMAN, FORMER CEO OF UNILEVER



Leaders in Lockdown is a unique insight from the women and men who were on the front line of leading the business world's fight against Covid-19. From New York to Singapore to Hong Kong to the City of London, it captures a remarkable moment in time – when the global economy was brought to a shuddering halt in the struggle to contain a deadly pandemic. These first-hand accounts of 100 days of lockdown tell stories of leadership in a crisis. They also share the wisdom of some of the world's most thoughtful business leaders as they predict how the world will change because of Covid-19.

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INSIDE STORIES OF COVID-19 AND
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Black Isle Group (BIG) is a leadership development business based in the City of London and working with blue chip companies around the world. The philosophy of BIG is to help leaders maximise their personal performance and the performance of their teams. The business blends some of the world's best coaching with innovative Nudge technology to change behaviours and deliver long-lasting results.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

I am extremely grateful to all 28 leaders in lockdown who gave their time freely to speak to me and share their wisdom for this endeavour. I would also like to acknowledge all my Black Isle Group colleagues – especially Jeremy Campbell and Ashleigh Evans – for their support. My thanks are also due to Martin Liu at LID Business Media for his faith in agreeing to set off on this venture in the first place; to Susan Furber for bringing order to my chaos; to Hazel Bird for her copy editing and her patience with my misuse of the comma; and to Aiyana Curtis for picking up the cudgels half way through. Last and by no means least I would like to thank the ever-patient Emily, my partner in life. It is unclear whether writing this book made things easier or more challenging for her as we hunkered down in close confinement behind our walls for 100 days of COVID-19. A time we will never forget.

This is a story of leadership. It's set in an extraordinary period in history – a time when the world was hit by the greatest health crisis in the modern era and the global economy was brought to a standstill. It is centred on 28 interviews with 'leaders in lockdown'. All were conducted by videoconference over 100 days from mid-March to late June 2020. By the end of that period, more than ten million people had been infected with COVID-19, 500,000 had died,¹ 1.6 billion people were in danger of losing their livelihoods² and half of the world's countries had approached the International Monetary Fund for financial assistance.³

No CEO, chairman or board had been through anything like this before. The crisis was made all the more remarkable because for most of this time our business leaders were sat at home, many locked down at their kitchen tables – like champion thoroughbreds shut in their stables. This was a state quite foreign to a breed who've spent most of their lives hurtling around on planes, trains and automobiles with barely a minute to spare. Working from home, they had time to reflect and cast their minds forward to consider the question, what next?

This book strives to do two things. First, it aims to provide a unique window into the insights, behaviours and actions of a pantheon of the world's most thoughtful business leaders through their inside stories of COVID-19. I hope this may help readers and leaders to learn, develop and be prepared better to tackle the crises of the future. As an INSEAD executive coach and chairman of the leadership development business Black Isle Group, my purpose is to help others to become better leaders. In Chapter 29, I provide some insights and analysis in order to stimulate personal reflection and leadership learning.

The second objective of this book is to look forward and analyse what will change in the world because of what we have been through. Looking through the crystal balls of the leaders in lockdown, I anticipate the megatrends that may emerge. I flag these throughout the book as the seven key themes which will come from the crisis.

1. The new age of purpose
2. The new world of work
3. Tackling inequality
4. Global cooperation
5. Resilience
6. Resetting the supply chain
7. Maximizing potential

I hope these themes will stimulate thinking and help leaders to prepare their strategies and business models for life after COVID-19. Each leadership interview is dated in case readers seek to understand at which stage in the crisis the views were gathered. Things changed rapidly throughout lockdown.

This is not a root-and-branch analysis of COVID-19. Nor is it a forensic investigation into how governments and public servants dealt with it, though some of our interviewees couldn't resist a few observations on some of their triumphs and failures. This is also not the story of the heroes of our health services.

Around the world, they displayed fortitude, bravery and compassion over many months. They strived to prevent every death and to care for every suffering human. The debt they are owed by society will never be repaid, but I leave it to others to tell their story more effectively and with greater insight.

In my career, I have been through more crises than most. As a BBC journalist, I was on the ground at Lockerbie in Scotland on the night in 1988 when 270 people died when a terrorist bomb blew Pan Am Flight 103 out of the sky. I was in Aberdeen, Scotland, when 167 people were killed as a result of the explosion of the Piper Alpha oil rig. I witnessed the scenes of grief in 1996 as a gunman shot 16 children and a teacher at a primary school in Dunblane, Scotland. I worked through 9/11 as the Twin Towers fell and witnessed every twist and turn of the global financial crisis in 2008. What did leaders and society learn from all these tragedies? What changed? Not enough.

The leadership learnings in this book will stay current as the memories of lockdown fade. They will be as relevant in the future as they were to the challenges of COVID-19. Developing, nurturing and improving our leaders is crucial for advancing humanity. There is a belief that the world and the businesses that sit at the heart of society are at a crossroads. We face many existential questions. How will our political leaders, our business leaders and our citizens deal with them? I hope you will find that our leaders in lockdown have some of the answers.

WORDS OF WISDOM

Our leaders in lockdown all spoke with admirable brevity, clarity and impact. They demonstrated this through their words of wisdom. There was no shortage of well-turned phrases that captured the moment and made me stop and think. As an aperitif ahead of the main course, I have pulled together some of these wise words.

"We need to inject humanity back into leadership." – Marian Salzman

"People will be staring into one of the defining challenges of our times, which is unemployment. We need to really lean into it and solve the social inequality." – Leena Nair

"My biggest message for business leaders is that another crisis is coming our way. Are we going to do anything about it? Or will it be just like COVID-19?" – Osvald Bjelland

"You have to make decisions when you haven't got complete information. That's really one definition of leadership." – Mark Thompson

"The community is not just another stakeholder. It is the purpose for our very own existence." – Nupur Singh Mallick

"The full impact of this is enormous. We are not returning to the past." – George Hongchoy

"You need to bring your boldest self to a crisis but don't do it on your own." – Richard Bevan

"I wish a revolution could be born out of this crisis." – Pocket Sun

"The one thing this proves is that trickle-down economics doesn't work." – Sacha Romanovitch

"I fear this may turn into public revolution and disorder, because when people become hungry, they become desperate." – Sir Brian Souter

"Women shouldn't have to do two things to succeed while a man only has to do one." – Vivienne Artz

"The virus has exposed the selfishness of countries and people far more than it has shown our ability to be compassionate internationalists." – Ho Kwon Ping

"What is that world we want to aspire for our children to live in? Can we try and build that one rather than the one we were destroying six months ago?" – Alison Martin

"Diplomacy for the next generation, if not several generations, is going to be redrawn." – Gary Liu

"There are a few organizations that sadly have leaders who are waiting to snap back in muscle memory and get back to the way it was. That's a false idea. There is no going back because your competition is going to a better place." – General Stan McChrystal

"We were the first out and we'll be the last back. But New York won't be back till Broadway is back." – Charlotte St Martin

"We never thought we'd see worse than 9/11." – Alasdair Nichol

"Nobody wants to go into an office. They are all petrified." – Andrea Murad

"We are judged as leaders not on what we are like when the going is good. We are judged as leaders on what we are like when the going is tough." – Sir David Behan

"Don't go out and say you are a long-term investor ... unless you have the stomach to live through the ups and downs." – Clement Kwok

"With COVID-19, every single long-held belief has been thrown out of the window." – Christian Lannig

"Globalization has made us better off, but better for whom? Better off for only 10%." – Martin Gilbert

"Recessions are where small businesses and entrepreneurs really stand out. They are key to facilitating new ways of going forward." – Mike Cherry

"Anything a human can do can be done by robots in the future." – Li Tong

"I fundamentally believe that this moment in time will shift the way humanity thinks about health." – Will Ahmed

"This is a reckoning, a moment of truth when organizations will be judged on giving purpose real meaning through action not words." – Sally Osman

"How do you want to be remembered at a time when the world is paying attention?" – Derek Deasy

"I hope we will be a more caring and kinder society." – Pinky Lilani

PROLOGUE

MY LIFE IN LOCKDOWN

There is a place I sit on top of the sand dunes. It's a few minutes' stroll from where I live in North Berwick, a seaside town on the east coast of Scotland. It's a perfect spot to ponder.

I perched there one morning in mid-March 2020 just after sunrise. It was a tranquil, stunning scene. The view has hardly changed since the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson looked out from the same place more than 150 years ago and imagined *Treasure Island*. His inspiration was the little rock of Fidra, which sits 150 yards across a deep blue channel. It's one of four islands dotted in the waters of the Firth beyond the mile-long caramel sands. They were the backdrop to my life in lockdown.

Sitting in such a stunning place, it was hard to imagine the horror that was going on elsewhere – the gasping people in the hospitals of London, the mounting losses in Lombardy or the mobile morgues in the shadows of Manhattan's skyscrapers.

But it wasn't business as usual for me. Far from it. Each company I work with felt the full brunt of COVID-19. I chair Black Isle Group (BIG). It's a leadership development business that works with senior executive teams in blue chip companies such as

Barclays and Standard Chartered – in the City of London and beyond. Many clients cancelled or postponed their upcoming work with BIG within 72 hours of the crisis escalating. However, by the middle of lockdown, the more insightful had realized that there had never been a more important time to invest in developing leaders and improving the performance of their teams.

I also sit on the board of the British Horseracing Authority. It's the regulator and governing body for the sport of horseracing. The sport closed down in mid-March as the UK government made clear it was about to ban all large gatherings. The consequences for the 80,000 people who make their living connected to the sport were severe. The weeks of lockdown were consumed with efforts across the industry to get racing going again the moment government allowed. Every day that passed threatened more and more businesses that depend on the sport for their livelihood. Passions ran high. Thanks to a huge collective effort, horseracing was the first professional sport in the UK to return behind closed doors as lockdown was lifted.

I also chair the Scottish Salmon Producers Organisation, which represents companies that produce £1 billion of salmon every year. The salmon is the king of fish. The Scottish salmon is the king of salmon. The sector is the UK's largest food exporter. In 2019 the value of Scottish salmon that went to foreign markets – such as Europe, the US and China – was more than £600 million. The sector supports 10,000 jobs, mainly in rural communities. When COVID-19 struck, the overseas markets and the world's restaurants closed down. The impact on the sector was sudden and serious. The immediate challenge was keeping fish on the supermarket shelves in the UK. The closure of the overseas markets would cause pain for a lot longer.

I also sit on the board of a cinema business that includes the Edinburgh Filmhouse, the Belmont Filmhouse in Aberdeen and the Edinburgh International Film Festival. The week before the crisis broke, we had announced plans to build an ambitious new 11-storey movie theatre, 'a temple for film'. We were basking in the glory when the virus struck.

Box office takings slumped from £7,000 a day to £400 as people stayed at home. The last showing at the Edinburgh Filmhouse was the French movie *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, which had just won Best Screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival. There were four people in the stalls when the curtain fell. None of us knew when it would rise again.

I also chair UK Coaching, which educates and champions coaches in sport at the elite and community levels. We work with national governing bodies and individual coaches to provide learning and development. We also help to inspire people to be more active. When the virus came, the commercial activity of UK Coaching ground to a halt. Suddenly a business that was already being reinvented by its executive was rapidly dealing with a whole new panoply of challenges.

Every one of these businesses was threatened by the crisis. Everyone had to face the harsh financial consequences. The people who work in these businesses were impacted deeply by both the health and the economic consequences of COVID-19. Over the weeks and months of the crisis, the senior teams and their boards would have to work together to ensure they survived. If we made it through, we all wanted to come out on the other side in better shape to face the post-COVID-19 world.

Businesses around the world, large and small, faced the same issues as we did. Their employees faced the same anxiety. How would they pay their mortgages? How would they feed their families? How would they cope if they or their families caught the virus? Would they have a job to go back to at the end of it all?

I also do a lot of executive coaching with CEOs and executive directors. This was a time of great stress and strain for these leaders. They needed time to reflect, time to stand back, and time to share their worries and to consider carefully the momentous decisions they were taking every day. There was never a more important time to be an executive coach. There was never a more important time to *have* an executive coach. Those who did not would not maximize their own performance.

In the early weeks of COVID-19, my working day fell into a routine. I felt a little guilty that it was not in the least unpleasant. I was bunkered in our home office in a converted garage a pebble's throw from the beach. Our COVID-19 bubble included my partner, Emily and our lockdown returning girls – Clara and Rosie. Rosie's boyfriend Leo had also snuck in. In normal times, I work mainly in London. That means commuting for a two- or three-day trip every week on the East Coast Main Line.

Instead of rushing south, when the alarm went off, I now ambled out most mornings for a gentle run. I padded alongside the lush fairways of the West Links, Archerfield and Renaissance golf courses. Then I'd jog on towards the hallowed turf of Muirfield, the scene of Open triumphs by the greatest names in golf.

After a while, with only a few curious deer for company, I would turn down to the beach. Glistening in the Firth of Forth all around were reminders of the economic crisis. Four Fred Olsen ferries moored in the bay at Aberlady, laid up for the duration. Oil tankers dotted on the horizon, lying empty with no oil to carry. Rigs standing idle off the shore of Fife with no need to drill. Golf courses with their flags removed – bereft of the tourists who spend millions round here and closed to the locals.

Then with the wind behind me, I would head home for breakfast, the chorus of the Fiddra gulls my only company. The sea on my left-hand side. The sand under my soles. Sidestepping the occasional jellyfish. The breeze helping me back. No London Underground. No travel anxiety. No air pollution. Like many other leaders in lockdown, I began to question, what is corporate life all about?

CHAPTER 1

IN THE BEGINNING

WEDNESDAY 22 JANUARY 2020

The freezing temperature makes Donald Trump shiver as he walks through the icy morning air of Davos, Switzerland. He's among 3,000 of the world's richest and most influential people at the World Economic Forum. The agenda is focused on climate change. Trump doesn't want to talk about that. His focus is the stellar performance of the US economy, on which he intends to anchor his re-election campaign. But when he arrives for a television interview with CNBC's Joe Kernen, he's asked about another matter – the first case of COVID-19 in the US. “Are there worries about a pandemic?” probes Kernen. Trump's answer is brief: “We have it totally under control. It's one person coming in from China, and we have it under control. It's going to be just fine.”⁴

THURSDAY 23 JANUARY 2020

Just after 11.20 am, the English Health Secretary, Matt Hancock, is at the despatch box in the House of Commons. Sandwiched between discussions on rugby league and Holocaust Memorial Day, he's here to give a ministerial statement. Several people have died in China after the outbreak of a virus in the city of Wuhan. Some cases are now being detected in other countries. There is none confirmed in the UK.

Mr Hancock tells the House, “The Chief Medical Officer has revised the risk to the UK population from ‘very low’ to ‘low’, and has concluded that while there is an increased likelihood that cases may arise in this country, we are well prepared and well equipped to deal with them. The UK is one of the first countries to have developed a world-leading test for the new coronavirus. The NHS is ready to respond appropriately to any cases that emerge. ... The public can be assured that the whole of the UK is always well prepared for these types of outbreaks.”⁵

FRIDAY 24 JANUARY 2020

The Lancet is a globally renowned medical journal that publishes peer-reviewed articles from leading experts in the profession. Today it has released a piece titled ‘A Novel Coronavirus Outbreak of Global Health Concern.’ The paper notes that by 23 January 2020 there were 835 cases of a new virus in China. Twenty-five people had died. *The Lancet* article explains, “The increasing number of cases and widening geographical spread of the disease raise grave concerns about the future trajectory of the outbreak, especially with the Chinese New Year quickly approaching. Under normal circumstances, an estimated 3 billion trips would be made in the Spring Festival travel rush this year, with 15 million trips happening in Wuhan. The virus might further spread to other places during this festival period and

cause epidemics, especially if it has acquired the ability to efficiently transmit from person to person.” The experts conclude, “Every effort should be given to understand and control the disease, and the time to act is now.”⁶

SATURDAY 25 JANUARY 2020

In Beijing, President Xi has convened an emergency meeting of his Politburo Standing Committee. Afterwards, he makes a rare public statement warning the Chinese public of the dangers of COVID-19. He describes it as a “grave situation.”⁷ The outbreak “must be taken seriously” and every possible measure pursued. Forty-one people have now died. Nearly 1,300 have been infected. President Xi places China on a war footing, locks down major cities and puts the People’s Liberation Army in charge of disease control.

MONDAY 27 JANUARY 2020

In the boardroom of one of the City of London’s largest investment firms, lunch is fast approaching. The board turns to ‘any other business’. The CEO raises the issue of the COVID-19 virus given the stories that emerged from China over the weekend. “Should the executive take any action to adjust their positions and strategy?” Around the table sit women and men who have been through 9/11, the global financial crisis and everything in between. A careful and considered discussion takes place. It lasts ten minutes. The CEO agrees to keep an eye on the situation. No action is to be taken. High up in this glassy tower, the meeting drifts to its conclusion. Lunch is served.

THURSDAY 12 MARCH 2020

As the day dawns, things are noticeably different. My early morning flight from Edinburgh to London Gatwick, which is normally packed, is only a quarter full. I step off the train at London Bridge Station and I’m struck by the hush. The masses are streaming onto the station concourse but today they walk in silence. Sombre, sullen faces. People look afraid. Some with heads bowed, tucked into their coats against the biting wind. The clamour that normally fills the air of the City is replaced with quiet. Today London wears a worried frown.

I emerge from the station and pass the newspaper stands. The headlines hail a massive injection into the UK economy as a ‘£30 Billion War on Virus.’⁸ “Whatever it takes,” the Chancellor Rishi Sunak told the Commons.⁹

As the chimes of the City’s clocks strike 8 am, I stride onto London Bridge and the stock market starts to plummet. The famous skyline emerges in front of me – the citadels of one of the world’s greatest financial centres. Landmarks such as the Cheesegrater, the Gherkin and the Walkie Talkie tower across the horizon. St Paul’s Cathedral pierces the blue sky away to my left, its dome a symbol of British fortitude and survival during the Blitz, its tombs the resting place of many British heroes, including Admiral Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington.

In their new shiny offices in the shadows of the dome of St Paul’s, the journalists of the *Financial Times* are discussing Rishi Sunak’s budget at their morning meeting when they are distracted by the market rout taking shape on the TV screens around them.

I walk on through the famous streets of the Square Mile. I pass Lombard Street, Leadenhall and Threadneedle Street. These cobbles have reverberated to many a stock market crash. They saw the South Sea Bubble of 1720. They felt the pain of the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed. They saw Black Monday in 1987. They watched Black Wednesday in 1992, when the Conservative government was forced to withdraw the

pound from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism. They observed the financial carnage in the aftermath of the terror attacks on 11 September 2001. They saw the torment of the credit crunch of 2008. Now they bear silent witness to the opening of another chapter in the City's history.

By the time I arrive at the destination of my meeting, another market crash is well underway. The World Health Organization has declared that COVID-19 is now a pandemic. Today is historic on Wall Street too. The Dow drops 10% – its biggest fall since Black Monday in 1987. It's the end of a bull market that has had an unbroken run since 2009.

By the day's end, Donald Trump has announced a ban on travel from Europe to the US, Boris Johnson has told a press conference that this is the “worst health crisis in a generation,”¹⁰ and countries across Europe have started to close schools and take measures that are unprecedented in peacetime.

The newspaper *City AM* calls it the day of the ‘Corona Crash.’¹¹ For many in the Western world, it's the day that COVID-19 hits home.

CHAPTER 2

LOCKDOWN

“There are decades where nothing happens; and there are weeks where decades happen,” the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, Vladimir Lenin, is reputed to have said.

Over a few days in mid-March 2020, the sheer scale of global events could have filled a decade. The death toll escalated at an astonishing rate as the virus spread like wildfire. The scenes in Italy were particularly dramatic. Thousands died. In Bergamo, soldiers were drafted in to carry coffins from warehouses to crematoria.

Countries began to enter lockdown across the world. Egypt, Germany, India, Ireland, Poland, Russia and many more told citizens to stay at home. New Zealand followed South Africa to declare a national state of emergency.

The first of the economic bailouts began. The US senate agreed a stimulus of \$2 trillion. More than three million people signed on as unemployed in the US in one week alone. They were just the early adopters as the total figure rose to 40 million before lockdown eased ten weeks later.

Shortages of emergency medical equipment began to emerge. Doctors in Spain complained that they didn't have the kit they

needed to save lives. New York pleaded for 30,000 new ventilators. The US Defense Production Act was triggered to get General Motors to start making them. New York City was fast becoming one of the world's epicentres.

The US surpassed China as the country with the most cases. Infections were now appearing across the States, although the president still thought the crisis would be short-lived, hoping businesses could be reopened in weeks. "I'm not looking at months," he said.¹²

As the terror of the virus spread across the West, China said it was past the worst. On some days it claimed the country had no new cases. But questions were beginning to be asked about the reliability of China's figures amid the first hints of another battle to come. The Tokyo Olympics were postponed for a year.

As hospitals began to fill up, the business world began to feel sick too. Ernest Hemingway's 1926 novel *The Sun Also Rises*¹³ describes the process of approaching corporate death. "How did you go bankrupt?" asks one of the characters. "Two ways," comes the reply. "Gradually and then suddenly."

The business impact of COVID-19 was being felt suddenly across the world. The airline industry was one of the first to implode. With shops shut, many retail companies were also on the critical list. Hospitality, travel, pubs, restaurants and rental car companies fought to save their corporate lives. Car manufacturers took drastic actions. Chrysler, Fiat, Peugeot, Renault and Volkswagen all announced they were shutting factories across Europe. The global economy was being switched off.

One of the world's best-known investors – the 'Oracle of Omaha', Warren Buffet – has experienced his fair share of financial crashes. He has previously described economic recession with the words: "It is only when the tide goes out that you find out who has been swimming naked."¹⁴ This time, even those who had been modestly well covered were in danger of being exposed.

The world of insolvency practitioners is notoriously discreet. Confidentiality is important, especially in the first stages of financial

intensive care. So much is market sensitive. Rumours can hasten the death throes. One senior insolvency partner revealed to me what the start of COVID-19 was like for him: "The first few days made me realize what it must have felt like when the *Titanic* hit the iceberg – a scary number of companies, big and small, started stampeding for the lifeboats. The panic was palpable. They were drowning but we were drowning too. I thought how the heck are we going to cope? How will the insolvency world have the capacity to deal with such a tsunami of corporate failure?"

There were only 1,700 insolvency practitioners in the UK who could be appointed by courts to carry out administrations.¹⁵ There were 17,000 corporate insolvencies in 2019.¹⁶ Now it was predicted half a million companies were on the brink of going bust in the UK alone.

But insolvency leaders saw two opportunities. First, they would be one of the few industries to do well in the crash. Fees would be eye-watering by the time it was over. But this could also be a time to enhance the profession's reputation. The public saw them as the people who closed factories and made mass redundancies. They would prefer to be known for rescuing some of the world's best-known brands and saving thousands of jobs.

As the insolvency practitioners' phones rang off the hook, the directors of well-capitalized businesses with strong balance sheets sat quietly pleased with themselves. They had cash to see them through.

History tells us repeatedly that when the crisis hits the fan, the most important thing for every business is cash. We used to say, "cash is king." When COVID-19 hit, cash was God. Lack of it meant the death knell for those who had been living on borrowed time. It also threatened good, profitable businesses faced with an unprecedented reduction in revenue. No matter how healthy your future order book, if you don't have cash in the bank to pay the wages and the bills, you go bust.

The truth is that a large number of small- and medium-sized enterprises only ever have a few weeks' working capital. The only

answer in an economic situation of this magnitude was for the government to bail out entire industries in a way that had never been done before.

On Friday 20 March 2020, just after 5 pm, the UK Chancellor did just that. “The economic intervention that I’m announcing today is unprecedented in the history of the British state,” he told the House of Commons. Rishi Sunak had only been in post for 36 days. “Getting through this will require a collective national effort, with a role for everyone to play – people, businesses and government. It’s on all of us,” he said.¹⁷

His measures were worth £350 billion – more than ten times his announcement of the previous week. For the first time in British history, the government would pay the wages of workers in what became known as ‘the furlough scheme’.

The Chancellor went on, “We want to look back on this time and remember how, in the face of a generation-defining moment, we undertook a collective national effort – and we stood together.”

It was a hugely powerful moment for all those watching on television or listening on the radio. Many commentators said it was reminiscent of wartime. At this moment, it was a war against an unseen virus doing unseen damage to unknowing people right across the world.

Within a few weeks the British state would be paying the wages of around nine million workers. As always, the devil is in the detail of a government scheme. Immediately, some felt left out, especially the self-employed. That would be remedied.

Seventy-two hours later, on the evening of Monday 23 March, the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, sat in Downing Street, the Union Flag hanging by his side. His task was to address the British public through a national TV broadcast.

“Without a huge national effort to halt the growth of this virus, there will come a moment when no health service in the world could possibly cope; because there won’t be enough ventilators, enough intensive care beds, enough doctors and nurses,”¹⁸ he explained.

He announced the unprecedented peacetime measure of locking down Britain. People would only be allowed to leave their home for very limited purposes. Essential workers could travel to their work. People could shop for basic necessities and take one form of exercise a day. Otherwise, they should only leave their homes for any medical need or to provide care for the vulnerable. Public gatherings of more than two people were banned. Nearly all shops would close, with supermarkets, grocers and pharmacists the exceptions. All social events were outlawed as well as weddings and baptisms. Funerals would be allowed but attendance would be restricted. There would be a necessity to bury the dead.

The prime minister concluded, “In this fight we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly enlisted. ... To protect our NHS and to save many many thousands of lives. ... the people of this country will rise to that challenge. And we will come through it stronger than ever.”

The headline on the front of Britain’s *Daily Telegraph* the next morning bellowed “The End of Freedom.”¹⁹

We now know that the UK economy contracted by 25% in March and April 2020.²⁰ Never before in history had we seen such a drop. Hundreds of thousands of businesses were facing bankruptcy. Unemployment was heading for unprecedented levels. The people’s future was more uncertain than at any time since 1945. The country had moved from shutdown to lockdown. In a few days, we had witnessed more momentous events than we’d seen in decades. The capitalist system had been laid low by COVID-19. Even Lenin could not have imagined anything like this.

THE NEW AGE OF PURPOSE

In the 28 leadership interviews carried out for this book, everyone agreed that things would never be the same again. How much would change was a matter of varying opinion. Seven key themes emerged:

1. The new age of purpose
2. The new world of work
3. Tackling inequality
4. Global cooperation
5. Resilience
6. Resetting the supply chain
7. Maximizing potential

Most leaders covered every one of these themes while more passionately advocating for those they felt most strongly about.

In the next three chapters, the leaders interviewed touch on a wide range of insights as they tell their stories of lockdown. There is a common thread that runs between them – their passion about purpose. Marian Salzman’s view is that “purpose is no longer a line or two to emblazon on a website and forget about.”

Leena Nair’s company, Unilever, has been in the vanguard of leading with purpose in recent years. It’s at the heart of what they do for the benefit of their customers, employees and a much wider range of stakeholders. Leena explains that throughout the period of lockdown, “purpose [was] truly elevated.” Focused by their purpose in July 2020 Unilever became the most valuable company in the FTSE 100.

Osvold Bjelland sees large corporations with purpose at their heart as the way to tackle the many serious issues facing the world – from climate change to inequality to poverty. The contention is that we have been talking a good game in the corporate world but not delivering. Now, post-COVID-19, it’s time to get serious and create the new age of purpose.

CHAPTER 3

MARIAN SALZMAN, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS, PHILIP MORRIS INTERNATIONAL

LOCKED DOWN IN PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND, US, 3 APRIL 2020

Marian Salzman is covered in sanitizer and hunkering down in her beach shack in Rhode Island when we speak. She's sharing the modest space with her husband and her two beloved Golden Retrievers.

It's from this isolation outpost that she's running her team of 700 – the women and men at the front line of efforts by the world's largest tobacco company to create a smoke-free future. A future free of cigarettes.

She's ten days into the 14 she needs to be sure she hasn't contracted COVID-19. She was tested back in Switzerland, where Philip Morris International (PMI) is based. "The test is no pleasure," she says, squirming as she remembers the invasion of her nasal privacy. The result was negative. Still, she's taking no chances.

As we talk, the National Guard is retreating from Marian's beach hut after a visit to check things out. The state of Rhode Island has been exceptionally vigilant in ensuring potential carriers of the virus remain under a two-week quarantine.

Marian is a serious player in global corporate life. She's the senior vice president of global communications for PMI, charged with making the company – once famous for the Marlboro Man – into a respectable corporate citizen as it continues its transformation away from cigarettes. It's a task fit for her.

She has been described as a charismatic power blonde – "think Carrie Bradshaw mixed with Hillary Clinton"²¹ – and her COVID-19 uncertainty has not taken the edge off the sharpness of her opinions.

"One thing we need to do on the back of this," she tells me, "is inject humanity back into leadership. We've had enough of all these layers of hubris. We have underestimated the importance of being a decent human being.

"I did something provocative," she admits. Marian sent a very personal note to each one of her 700 employees, asking everyone to get in touch "if you want to talk." The response was powerful. First, a co-worker who was pregnant and all alone reached out. Then a colleague in Italy unable to attend the funerals of family members who had died.

Marian has spent much of her life in the testosterone-fuelled atmosphere of New York City advertising. She is the generation which followed the era depicted in the TV series *Mad Men*. Just as that world changed, now she thinks we will emerge from COVID-19 with a complete rewriting of the rules.

"An entire generation will be shaped by this in the way that many Americans were shaped by 9/11," she says. It took a long time after those terrorist attacks before Marian, then living in Manhattan, would venture above the lower floors of any skyscraper.

One of the changes she loudly predicts is that more and more, "all life will be local. The pioneering spirit may end." She also foresees fewer barriers between work and home life. "We will have to answer, what is work? Where is work? If I were in commercial real estate, I would be terrified. An office is going to become a luxury – and a liability."

Marian says WPP CEO Martin Sorrell once suggested she "get a thicker skin." Now she thinks, "Maybe we will have to teach people

how to face fear.” Much of her leadership thinking is around how to help the younger generation. She is concerned about the consequences of home schooling for the poor and those who have chaos in their homes. While there is much opportunity in a new way of educating young people, there is a great danger it will further widen the socio-economic divide.

With an Ivy League education, she also sees big implications for the most famous American cathedrals of learning. “What will become of Yale and Harvard?” she ponders. Then there are the countless millions who are losing their jobs right across the US economy.

“We are facing a lost generation. How will they fit back into the workplace? Maybe we will have to enlist our juniors and reinvent national service.” As someone who has inhabited the corridors of corporate power most of her life, she remains confident that the new world order will not see a crucifixion of corporations.

“The big corporates are being hugely generous. I believe the bigger well-run companies will be the glue that holds communities together. I have never been more grateful to work for a large company – and not just because of the healthcare.”

Marian sees a significant merging of brand strategy and corporate philanthropy. “Corporate purpose is no longer a line or two to emblazon on a website and forget about; it now sits at the heart of the business, serving as a guide for big decisions.” She points to a list of corporate examples.

“When a company sets up a fund to cover the basic needs of its employees and their families during the crisis – as Booz Allen, Comcast and others have done – is that philanthropy or a new form of employee-based universal basic income?”

“When Crocs donates 10,000 pairs of shoes to healthcare workers, is it philanthropy, product placement or a thank you to some of its most loyal customers? When Rolls-Royce, Airbus and Microsoft team up to produce ventilators, is that philanthropy or an evolution of the sort of private-public partnerships we haven’t seen since GE teamed up with NASA on Apollo 11?”

“When Indian start-up Oyo Hotels & Homes offers accommodation for free or at sharply reduced rates to healthcare workers battling the COVID-19 crisis, is that philanthropy or PR? When Starbucks pays workers for 30 days, even if they don’t show up for work, is it philanthropy or an expansion of sick leave? When Zoom gives its video platform to K-12 schools for free, is it philanthropy or smart early acquisition marketing to a next generation of business customers? Or is it the birth of a new utility infrastructure?”

There are a number of reasons we should listen to Marian Salzman. Her website describes her as having “a brilliant knack for spotting trends before they go mainstream.” One commentator called her “an octane-fuelled, 100-ideas-a-minute bunny.”²² In the current crisis, she sees major shifts in the corporate landscape and in behaviours across society.

“I am encouraged to see so many individuals and organizations being their best selves. People are helping each other – neighbours and strangers – in ways big and small. Companies are filling gaps left by governments. It’s ironic that it’s taken our enforced physical distancing to bring people closer together.

“Let’s keep talking, keep experimenting, keep learning, keep sharing. Maybe, just maybe, we’ll emerge from all the devastation as a more civil society.”

The latest edition of Marian Salzman’s annual trends report, published at the end of 2019, was titled *Chaos: The New Normal*.²³ She doesn’t claim it was a premonition. But in her final words to me, she couldn’t have been clearer.

“There is so much need now for doing things differently.”