

Focus on your future in a post-lockdown world

by

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We have now reached the 40th day of the national lockdown in South Africa. If you read this article you have survived 40 days. That is your immediate past during this period of the coronavirus pandemic. When you started the year 2020 on the 1st of January, you could not have foreseen such a disaster three months later. Going into survival mode also means that you focus more on the present and that you try to concentrate on your own life as your work and live through yet another frustrating day of lockdown. Today I want to challenge you to think and work more on the future during this difficult time. Not only will it help you to see life beyond the lockdown, it will refocus your mind and priorities in terms of your own future.

All of us come from the past. We were born many years ago, some of us longer ago than others. Some of us entered university and the workplace and we started to progress in our careers. Some of us have moved up the ranks, others opened their own businesses, while others decided to enter the academic world, either in a part-time or full-time position. Having said that, the reality is that all of us bring our past into our current places. For instance, your university degree opened a door for you to continue with postgraduate studies or to enter the workplace. Or your internship, or first job helped you to gain access to better and more advanced jobs in your career. The reality is that your CV is a summary of your past. It gives an indication to your prospective employer what value you can add to the business.

However, while your past may be full of multiple achievements in different settings such as your schools, university, community and employers, the question is whether you are living in the past or living in the future. For many of us it is so easy to get stuck in the past or to cling to your past achievements. This is an even greater trap to fall into during these times of lockdown. You are thinking about the “good old days” when you could move around freely, go to the beach, go on holiday, visit your friends, parents or favourite restaurant. Then the past appears to be a better place than the current dreadful state of lockdown.

In today’s uncertain and volatile work environment caused by the coronavirus pandemic, we also need people who are more future-focused, i.e. people who can create the future. Our current short term focus is on health, while the economy comes second, and future issues are not even considered. Thus, the key question is whether you live in the past, present or the future. In fact, to be successful in the future workplace and society, we need more future-focused people who are ready to make the future happen. We need people who are already thinking about how we will turn this economy around with a level of innovation we have never seen before.

But how can we become more future-focused?

- Think about future opportunities presented by the coronavirus. Can you anticipate future needs and opportunities when we embark on the journey to recover and grow our businesses and economy?

- Consider your readiness for the future of work and the Fourth Industrial Revolution and think about opportunities and innovations to pursue.
- Read more about the future to learn about future possibilities. Magazines such as *Fast Company* are good sources to help develop a more future mind-set.
- Learn from the youth. It is evident that the youth is more ready for the future. They have grown up with the Internet and they are comfortable with the new mobile devices, applications and gadgets in the market.
- Have a vision and plan for the future. The more you concentrate on the future world, the easier it will be for you to adapt to changes and contribute to creating the future.
- Move on from the past. Instead of highlighting your past achievements, focus more on future goals and work towards them. Also, continuously set new future goals for yourself and your company.
- Study the latest trends and developments. The more you embrace trends, the easier it becomes to embrace the future. You can fight other people, but you cannot fight a trend, it is irreversible.

It is so wonderful to see so many good South African innovations during this time of crisis. People are inventing new types of ventilators for hospitals, sanitising stations and other devices to deal with present needs. And of course, we must enjoy our present work from our remote sites, or returning to work sites that have been deep cleaned. I continue to work with my honours degree students from home, and I enjoy serving them every day. They are busy studying the future as part of our module on Strategic Human Resource Management. But I am also working on developing South Africa's first Postgraduate Diploma in Strategic Human Resource Management to be launched by Stellenbosch University in 2021. By focusing on a future goal, I shift my mind from my present discomfort and stress to a greater goal and purpose beyond my present inconvenience and sacrifices to make a contribution in building a better world in the post-lockdown period.

The uncertainty of our current situation will prepare us for a new future, a world that will be totally different to the status quo. You can be part of this exciting journey of a better life beyond the current despair and suffering. The future is here. Think about the future. Embrace the future. Create the future. Live in the future. Explore new things and be on top of your game. Leave the past behind, and be a co-creator of the future. While the lessons of the past may not even be relevant in the future, the challenge is to live with the uncertainty of the future, given the fact that all future work is always work in progress. Previous models of planning will become obsolete as we embrace fresh and new ways of doing things. Every workplace will require specialists in the future – people who are on a mission to not only adapt to the future, but to make the future happen. In addition, the future is not an elusive dream, every new day is a future opportunity of becoming more future-fit in using your skills to become more dynamic, modern and future-orientated. Unlock your future potential and creativity during this lockdown and plan a better future for yourself in the post lockdown world.

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