

# LESSONS LEARNT FROM LOCKDOWN

Whilst current and accurate news is an important element of dealing with and managing the COVID-19 pandemic, most people have pretty much had enough of the statistics, the theories about what will happen next and all the negativity South Africans are experiencing in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic that has shaken the world to its core.

Staff at the EWSETA were invited to share their views on working from home and what the lockdown has meant to them. Mxolisi Gugushe, EWSETA's highly respected Researcher penned this beautiful 'reflection' of his experience in lockdown. Whereas Nando's latest advertising campaign says that 'Not sharing is caring' (and they are absolutely spot on), we just had to share Mxolisi's thoughts. Enjoy! Ed

*"Out of the twilight the sun must rise, the birds must sing, the grass must grow, and the ocean waves must break. But never could I have imagined life would never be the same.*

*When grey turned to dark, fear and uncertainty forged new order as dreams were lost and hopes subdued. Never could I have imagined latitude would be a distant memory, a dull hue.*

*Bonds loosened, people estranged, and hearts of gold turned to stone; music no longer carries its once brilliant tune. Silent, off-key, off-beat and out of time, a deafening chord has struck simply out of a peaceful blue.*

*Yet somewhere in the distance my deceptive ambition glimmers a spark somewhat bright, after the dark. Yes, rise, rise in the midst of lost battles to win the war, victorious yet wounded a sturdy and persistent might.*

*The colourless affliction will heal, the worry will flee, will cease; a toast in sparkling glass to no more strife. The calming breeze will exhale and restore again this colour once called life."*

We have heard it many times, "this experience has been life-changing!". In an altered reality and despite the more obvious, insurmountable challenges many of us have faced during the lockdown, there have however been positive aspects that one cannot ignore. In fact, what you make of such challenges may be the key to unlocking potential for "opportunity creation". It all depends on how you see the world today; in other words, it's a subjective and deliberate choice.

During this lockdown I have learned many things, not only about life in general, but mostly about myself in particular.

## Strengthening of Self-Management Skills And The Rediscovery of Personal Leadership Capabilities

Since one must learn to be a leader in their own right irrespective of what circumstances may be faced in a lifetime, the lockdown forced me to reconcile this reality at a moment's notice. The need to lead oneself, especially in a time of crisis, cannot be emphasised enough. Taking responsibility and owning who you are and what you do largely define you. I have used my leadership capabilities to forge through my challenges and to take advantage of opportunities; whether it be work-related or at deeper level. Through this experience I am beginning to transcend above my own personal boundaries, boundaries that in fact never actually existed, but were no more than a mental block. Appreciating your leadership capabilities is a powerful and useful instrument.

## Enhancement of Self-Drive And Motivation

What gets one out of bed early every morning? What makes you passionate about the value you can potentially create once that alarm goes off and the sun begins to rise, fostering new challenges and opportunities? How does one see the light in times of ubiquitous and perpetual darkness? It might be relatively simple to call it quits and succumb to the current forces that may be. However, taking a detour towards the high road has presented a far more promising approach. It has kept one moving, kept one strong, kept one surviving. Being able to see the positive side even when the odds are gravely stacked against us is a valuable skill.

## Endurance, Health And Longevity

To put it simply and as the saying goes "healthy mind in a healthy body". I reconnected with my physical, mental and spiritual self by engaging in regular home workout routines. This began with a moderate workout and eventually evolved into an intense activity which I now enjoy more than ever. During my quieter times in the evenings after work I take a moment to reflect and "self-consult" on topics ranging from professional issues/challenges to the day's wins. I reflect on what worked and what didn't and attempt to reconcile these into lessons learned in preparation for the next day to come. I then round off my typical day with prayer and spiritual meditation.

## Personal Financial Management

Fortunately, I have always practiced good, hygienic financial habits. In fact, the lockdown forced me to become even more efficient and effective in my budgeting and expenditure, making sure that now every single rand and cent is accounted for. Financial hygiene is just as important as mental and physical well-being and this truth should never be underestimated.

## Personal Workspace

By creating a dedicated workstation designed to achieve one's professional deliverables is paramount. During the first official day of lockdown the very first thing I did was to prepare my workspace. This dedicated space was to allow for the continuation of my work schedule whilst minimising disruption. Disruption could potentially be in the form of interruptions from family members, nearby neighbour noise, etc. All disruptions include those that are a potential threat to being able to successfully achieve a fruitful and productive day's work. This meant organising my workspace in a place, position and size that would maximise productivity and minimise disruption.

## Learning at an Unprecedented Rate

One has had to learn "to learn" literally overnight. Learning to learn is not just about the skill aspect of it all but is also about the ability to accept that there are many things one does not know, especially those things that could be of great value during these difficult times. For instance, by participating in webinars and online workshops, I have managed to gather new insight across various topics which would later add value to my own professional workspace. Its safe to say that this newly acquired knowledge may not have otherwise been realised had it not been for the lockdown, which forced many of us to go "online", to go "virtual". Therefore e-learning has taken on several different forms in this light.

## Acquiring Much-Needed Support

Gaining necessary support in these unprecedented times has not been as easy as before. This has meant really making the most of the support one already has at their immediate disposal through close family, friends and willing/able colleagues. Learning to put pride aside and reach out, even if this may have been previously seen as a sign of weakness, today demonstrates a signal of strength. Organisations are forced to do their best to support staff as far as possible; for the sake of not only the organisation, but for the sake of preserving jobs.

## Working Together Apart

In my experience it has not at all been difficult to work remotely with my co-workers. Through effective and concise communication, whilst fully appreciating the importance of each objective to be achieved, one sees the significance of "life must go on, despite the circumstances". Planning cannot stop, and therefore, my work has required me to strive to continue to achieve our annual objectives as far as possible. This has meant working even more effectively with my colleagues and has demonstrated the importance of the work we perform together. Though no one has all the answers, nor should anyone ever irresponsibly claim to have the answers, through reflection and planning one can better position themselves for a highly unpredictable future.



## Increasing Work Efficiencies

Breaking down communication barriers has been at the centre of it all since effective remote communication platforms are critical mechanisms for business continuity. With increasing efficiencies and more time to focus without too much disruption, I have managed to improve my personal work capabilities five-fold. By way of a daily planner and reporting tool, I have been able to track and monitor my activities to keep abreast of my deliverables as it can be very easy to lose one's way under such complex circumstances. An easy-to-use daily schedule is a useful tool to have. Just be sure to keep it simple, uncluttered and concise; in other words, it should speak to the most critical activities required to achieve the day's objectives. In turn, the day's main objectives should be incrementally achieved to realise your overall objectives (e.g. monthly and quarterly objectives as contained in your annual operations plan and performance contract).

## New Challenges Often Beyond My Control

Even though I have developed my own personal tools and mechanisms to help improve my efficiencies, all has not been without unforeseen risks and new challenges. For example, one did not plan for the lockdown to go on for such an extended period. One must accept that this indeed is the "new normal" and life will never be the same again; but we must remember that there is opportunity in change.

## Stop Taking Things For Granted

From a personal point of view, the biggest lesson I believe I have learned in lockdown is to stop taking things for granted, even if I may do this inadvertently so. As sure as the sun will rise, the birds will sing, the grass will grow and the waves will break, uncertainty will never cease. Uncertainty is a natural part of life, good or bad, and I now know more than ever that I need to embrace every challenge, every opportunity, every win and every loss in a way that will seek to build me, to make me more me. No one in this world is perfect, but I have begun to more fully appreciate my own self-worth and that of others around me.

“Appreciating what we have when we have it counts far more than waiting till its lost.”