

LOCKDOWN LESSONS

WRITTEN BY JOHN A. MACSWEEN
MANAGING DIRECTOR, MALIN GROUP

These unusual times have had a lot written about them on key issues such as struggles with mental health, business cutbacks, regulations and government assistance and what it means to try and work when at home with the entire family. I thought I would share our experiences and mistakes in case it provides any assistance to others.

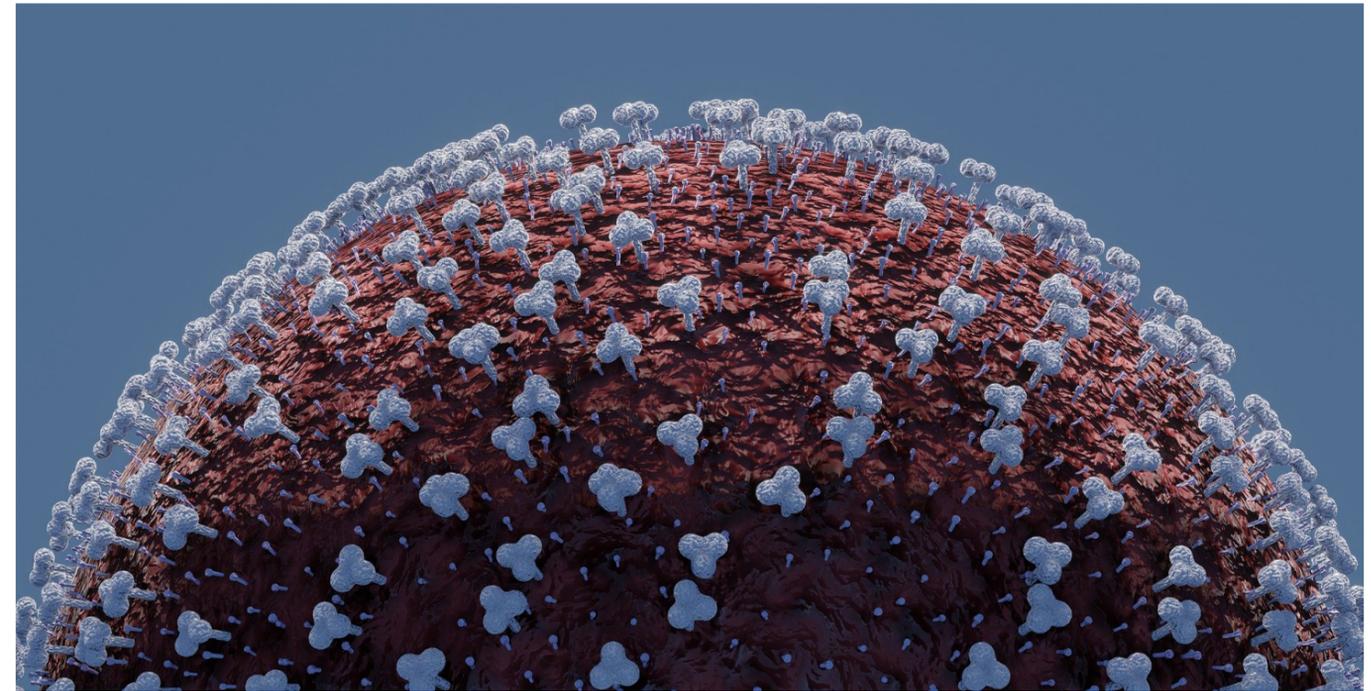
The last point is perhaps the most common. I had a quote passed to me by a colleague that noted this is not a period of working from home, but one of trying to do work while forced to stay at home. This is not semantics but an important difference. I have had a half clothed six year old come into Teams meetings and ask that I tell everyone on the call how old he is. I have had our last chicken (fox got the rest a few weeks ago) photo bomb a meeting. This is not business as normal and the message to our staff is to do your best, but don't worry if you have not logged your allotted hours (and be careful if you are logging a lot more as work and home life blur together).

The effect this lockdown has had on staff forced to stay at home, in our experience, is also wide and varied. Some thrive, some don't. I have heard from most that there are good days and bad days. Celebrate the good days and give yourself and your staff time to recover from the bad ones. It has, however, lessened our apprehension for working from home and it has forced us all to employ the technology we had at our fingertips but were not utilising fully. When back, first task for us will be a review with everyone to see what positive lessons can come from this experience.

The furlough provisions from the government were a welcome relief and a huge help however, we made some errors at the start - from initial interpretation on what is acceptable while on furlough to failing to immediately update claims when folk come off furlough in a rush to service work that comes in.

For example, we had put some senior staff on furlough and told them to do no work but maintain a watching brief on their critical projects and flag up to those still working if anything needs done... this is not permitted. In another example, we had a director on furlough under similar conditions and then failed to take him off when he had to go on site for a rush job, compounding the error. Similarly, we had a draughtsman re skill and do some training to be able to work in Inventor... which is permitted... but one of the models he created of a hatch found its way into a bid as an example graphic... which is not.

My advice? Get guidance and do a root and branch review now and learn the lessons so you can declare and correct errors as we did. We were lucky when a staff member pointed out these out to us which made us quickly stop and re-assess. We found errors in a minority of over 60 claims made, but nevertheless whether errors in interpretation or procedure, mistakes they certainly were. If we had not done the review, these would have compounded and we possibly would have sailed on to a disaster.



We also operate in a range of sectors. One of these, transport and shipping, is deemed critical and so here we can continue to work. But to do so, we have to put in place procedures to ensure the setup and working of a safe, temporary, marine site.

We also have a small fabrication facility based in Scotland, working on a range of projects from defence to renewables. We had implemented procedures and processes that allowed continuation of safe work. There was some confusion in our sector though, whether or not this was permitted in Scotland and we stood the team down for a week while we investigated. Fortunately a clarifying question in the Scottish Assembly made the position clear and allowed us to restart projects deemed critical, with all the right procedures in place.

Wider government support for the fall out from this will need to be far reaching as everyone adjusts to a new way of

doing things. The economic effects of this situation in certain industries will reverberate for years. The overarching message to owners and managers though is that the risks to your business are greater than just getting revenue through the door, hard as that may be. Legislative compliance, staff well being, and even just the day to day good running of your business processes and updating when required, which under normal circumstances is par for the course, all need a part of your time as well.

But don't lose sight of the positives - time for training, increased use of technology and especially in our own case, a reminder of the tenacity and team spirit of colleagues, even in the toughest times. And most of all, if at home, welcome the opportunity to turn commuting time into family time.