

Embracing my Chaos

By Kathy Kraus

I want to start by saying two things...

Firstly, this is not a motivational kick-up-the-butt to “*be your best self*”, learn a new skill, or learn to do 21 yoga positions in 21 minutes or whatever - but rather a look into the chaotic life of a single mum trying to juggle global clients, crisis schooling, personal development AND dishes in these extraordinary times. Secondly, it’s my first blog **EVER** so I feel duty-bound to tell you a few things about me. On a personal note, I am mom to 2 beautiful children [more on them in a moment]. I was married once, but I am much better now.

I am a corporate professional in recovery... after spending 15 years in corporate HR, I took a much-needed sabbatical to reconnect with my children and quite honestly just to get an uninterrupted night’s sleep. After a year of **voluntary lockdown** at home with my children and a housekeeper, I was **VERY** ready to get back to a normal life [hahahaha] as an economically active member of society.

I joined Catalyst in April 2018 and immediately found a home with our creative, collaborative, courageous Cats in the chaotic world of consulting. Fast-forward 2 years... I am the General Manager of Catalyst Consulting, and I am celebrating my 2-year anniversary, by myself, sans the bubbly that my colleagues and I so enjoyed a year ago.

Now I feel this is one of those watershed moments in life where there is a definite **pre- and post-** period. Pre-lockdown, I felt safe and warm in the knowledge that I had my dream job (most days), a healthy family and great kids (also most days) and a spectacular nanny and housekeeper. I was expertly balancing a full schedule at a thousand miles an hour. I was winning.

I, like the rest of South Africa, had 4 days to prepare for our **enforced lockdown**. Amid the flurry of last-minute shopping (no, I am not a panic buyer) and coffees with my favourite people, I failed to comprehend the enormity how my world was about to change

Now I admit, I am a little addicted to information, ok? So I read, a lot. And I read a lot of rubbish too (junk food for the brain). But all at once a seemingly infinite stream of motivational articles, white papers, digital self-driven courses, and social media posts encouraging me to do more with all this spare time I should have, left me feeling panicky, inadequate and exhausted.

Where working from home was once a perk – and yes, I am blessed to still be able to work and provide for my family - **I feel the walls closing in** some days. My days are filled with meetings (oh my aching nerves, the meetings). Given that I no longer need to (or can) travel to meet the needs of clients near and far, I no longer block out travel time, a quick lunch with a friend, or a nail appointment. My diary is jampacked with online meetings, Zoom conferences, WhatsApp calls, MS Teams meetings, Webex’s and webinars from dawn to dusk and beyond from Monday to Sunday (courtesy of clients in the Middle East).

Now I was recently educated, none-too-gently, that I am **NOT** homeschooling my children – noted Susan. But I digress. I love my children, more than life itself. But thrust into the role of *crisis schooling my children at home*, for which I am woefully underqualified, I can really appreciate how some species eat their young and I have a deep respect for the educators that take them off my hands every normal day.

Getting through 6-10 meetings; a few hours of actual work; 13 meals and the dishes; the washing and ironing; separating sibling squabbles (at least one an hour); all the while clinging to a vague sense of sanity **Every Single Day** has been exciting, hilarious, terrifying and deeply humbling. I know everyone is locked down in vastly different circumstances. But whether you're surrounded by kids, doing it solo, or with a partner or a pet, it's a struggle for everyone.

As a society we are **obsessed with achievement** (it's called destination addiction). The next goal, the next kilogram lost, the next book, the next exam, the next meeting, the next meal, the next holiday. Always pre-occupied with the idea that success is somewhere else. So when there is nowhere to go (literally) we have a real opportunity to redefine success, even if we feel a little lost.

So, no, Susan, I have not yet come up with an innovative new product or service offering. I have certainly not created wildly ambitious craft project ideas for my kids, nor have I spring-cleaned my kitchen. Getting through lockdown is not a competitive sport – and I won't come out of it any slimmer or more organised.

3 weeks in and entering Season 2 of enforced lockdown with my kids and without a housekeeper, I am still fighting the urge to "get back to a normal life". But one thing is clear... life will never go back to the way it was.

I have learnt that I need a whole lot less "stuff" than I thought (I do need a dishwasher though). I have learnt that my children's mental health (and my own) is way more important than all the worksheets, essays, projects, speeches, reading and creative writing sent with gay abandon by their teachers. I have learnt that with just a little bit of discipline and planning (ugh) it is possible to work from home and get most things done – even without a housekeeper. It is not easy, but it is possible. And I have learnt that linen, jeans and tracksuit pants definitely doesn't need to be ironed.

So I leave you with one of my favourite quotes at the moment from Gary Vaynerchuk. "Embracing the chaos, the nimbleness, and the things that you can't control, is the complete definition of a **LEADER** that's going to be able to navigate through the chaotic, never-predictable business world."

I don't know what the future holds, but at the very least, I will come out of lockdown, whenever that may be, a happier mum and a better leader. And that is enough for me.

Till next time, stay safe and sane.

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