

'Cribs', the ultimate diversity?

by Caroline Evans

Call me nosey, but I'd say observant, especially when it comes to people's homes. So now, one small upside of the terrible times we find ourselves experiencing, is the chance – once we've got to grips with the tech – to view each other's domestic backdrop or 'crib'.

I've never felt closer or more able to empathise with celebrities, newsreaders and various expert interviewees as I have done since I've been able to hear them speak from their home offices. Before it started, I'd have assumed it would be a distraction to try to work out the title on the spine of a book behind the headshot or wondering if it was a furry ear that popped up in the bottom corner of the screen; therefore missing their wise words. However, having now watched and listened to several such interviews, I believe that seeing 'the full picture' makes the audio more memorable. I certainly shan't forget the self-isolating advice of the very stylish north London GP whose home office was a family bedroom, complete with James Bond poster on the wall and a massive Lego box on top of the wardrobe.

Equally, the homes of our colleagues and business connections are coming into view and giving us new insight into the personalities of those we work alongside. I've just discovered I share an interest in Mid-Century Modern with a couple of colleagues. I'm not sure how long, if ever, it would have taken to make this connection without the video link. Reassuringly I've also seen that creating a polished home office scene is a work in progress for all of us. There's been no time to create the perfect setting to project a stylish life; all any of us have had time to do is a quick tidy up!

Of course, we've been exposed to 'home settings' in the past, on various reality shows and cookery programmes. But who has a kitchen like Jamie Oliver, the bedroom of an extreme hoarder or a fastidiously curated French chateau? These cribs are on TV because they are notably different; they are pivotal to the content. We are now seeing backdrops that are incidental and comforting in their familiarity.

Boardrooms were once uniformly wood panelled, leather chaired, polished surfaces full of equally polished suited men; probably all wearing the same 'club' tie. When women started to arrive in this space, they typically donned suits with shoulder pads to match the proportions of men's shoulders, heels to boost their height in such a grand setting and glossy accessories to reflect the polish.

More casual business wear has run parallel with younger boards and more informal office environments. Now that the advent of virtual board meetings 'chez nous' has been sprung upon us, where might it end? I'm quite sure that the current rules of etiquette around how we dress will largely be maintained; governed by common decency if nothing else. But, will we start to feel the urge to 'backdrop to impress' or will we let it all hang out? I'd like to think that we'll strike a balance, substance over style with a hint of memorable individuality.

Caroline Evans FCIS is founder of MindLeap, a corporate governance boutique. Caroline partners with several organisations providing expert advice and practical support, connects and collaborates across the corporate governance community and gives guidance as a company secretary and corporate governance speaker at conferences. She also offers coaching on career decision-making for company secretaries, governance professionals and aspiring NEDs.

www.mindleap.co.uk