

Downtime vs meltdown; taking back control!

by Caroline Evans

Do you remember this time last year and probably every year of your adult life before that? A maelstrom of work deadlines, professional and personal festive events to attend and seasonal domestic challenges to achieve; all on top of the everyday routines. I recall Christmas 2019 in particular because I suffered a setback – a total technology meltdown – that made everything else even more of a mountain to climb.

However, thanks to the help of a local and brilliant IT ‘A&E’ service, I survived! I’m unlikely to describe myself as intuitive in my approach to technology, as I am someone who ‘sees’ everything in pictures rather than numbers and diagrams. But since that momentous episode I have learned to manage my approach to IT ‘fails’ in a more methodical manner, which has proved useful in other contexts over this pandemic year.

As someone who is self-employed, I’ve had to rely on my longsuffering husband on many occasions, or on the generous support of my clients’ in-house tech teams. But this year I’ve been more proactive about working it out for myself. I wouldn’t say I found any of it ‘intuitive’ but I’ve discovered that fixing a problem is a real confidence booster!

Recently things got a whole lot more complicated for me on the IT front as I’ve now taken on an in-house role that has required me to join the ranks of Windows users and – as a Mac veteran – it’s been tough! I’m still getting to grips with two laptops, a mouse and two different sets of operating systems and their respective keystroke commands for everything; I even have two phones now! I’m certainly not complaining. I know how privileged I am to have been able to secure new employment at the moment, especially one that takes me onto a new stage in my career. However, it has meant I can no longer avoid learning to use a whole raft of software that ‘a proper job’ entails!

Of course, there’s no way of avoiding disasters entirely, so what can you do to mitigate the inevitable crisis? If you’ve established that return to normal is some time away, why not pull out the old-fashioned pen and paper combo and be creative:

- Get organised: write down a list of tasks not requiring technology, that you can complete.
- Go the extra mile: think of a question or challenge that a client or colleague expressed recently – even one that may not be your responsibility – and use your downtime to find a solution for them.

- Seize the moment: go and do something completely different that you wouldn't have been able to do if you were still tied to your hardware.
- Find a friend: any crisis is made much more bearable if you have someone you can turn to and share your frustrations with, be it an expert or another novice. We all know that empathy can make all the difference.

Taking control is so rewarding. Press the reset button and you'll boost your efficiency and your morale.

Not only has this 'can-do' approach improved my perspective on technology, it's helped me deal with all sorts of other challenges. Whilst I certainly don't want a repeat of last Christmas, if it does happen, I shall tackle it in the knowledge that not only is it solvable, I might actually learn and achieve a great deal of value from the experience.

It's now coming close to the end of 2020 and what a year we have had! However tough it's been and may continue to be for a while, I hope that we'll look back one day and see a positive impact on our lives.

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