

**[MICHAEL MANESS – CO-FOUNDER, SUBCULTURE]** One of the things we see with COVID is that organizations that are doing really well are really engaging with their clients. So, we talked about a lot how innovation happens not by interviewing your clients and finding out how to sell to them better. What we find is if you're interviewing your clients to understand what their needs are, or what their unmet needs are, that's really key here.

We did a survey with a company we work with, and talked to major brands, global, huge international brands. And what we found is if they're tone deaf about what's going on, if they're like using this to email market for example. That's deadly. It's a minefield right now for communication if you come across as arrogant, or you come across as being egotistical or that you're in it for yourself, you will be shut down very quickly.

So, this is a real time to be generous because whatever this is, post whatever this is, the companies that do really well about generosity with the clients – that's going to be remembered.

It's a big opportunity, if you're a small medium sized business, to deepen that relationship you have with clients. One of the things that you, because of your size, you can be much closer to understanding what people's needs are. And an SME is going to move ahead, much faster and survive this if they're being very conscious of what they're providing for the customer and that they're listening to them and having a dialogue with them that supports how that person is trying to get their business done as well.

### **THE COVID-19 ROLLERCOASTER**

One of the things to remember about the arc is that it starts out with a divergent idea from someone, they form an emergent team. They get operationally set, and then they have a 'sustain and defend' period, which is really where the success comes in. After that there's a successful stagnation where it becomes very dangerously disrupted.

What we're really seeing with COVID is the arc has become a roller coaster. You're up some days, you're down others – it really is moving fast and different levels and you have to prepare to ride that roller coaster. It's accelerant and decelerant – so you might have opportunities that grow really fast. Also, they might stagnate really fast. What is important for the next three months, might not be important to the next year.

If you only do one thing and that gets taken out, you're really exposed. So, the notion of having a portfolio right now is even more important. How many things are you rolling out? How many new initiatives are you trying? It's a really important opportunity to try experimentation and to take more risk because we don't know what the solution will be, we don't know what the answer is. So, if you have one thing, you're only tied to that. And if that goes away, you're in trouble. Having a lot of things or dipping a lot of toes in a lot of water is really important.

### **SURFING THE DISRUPTION**

My most hated phrase right now is: 'the new normal'. And the reason I hate that phrase is posits this A/B kind of moments, like: "we used to be this way and now we're this way". And, in fact, what it is – this is a completely rolling disruption that will continue unabated for some time. And at the end of that we'll be, I think, fundamentally altered from that. And if you don't think that, I think it's a very dangerous way of dominant logic setting in.

Expecting us to go back to where we were before, I think, is a fallacy. And also, we don't know when this will end. What you have to get ready for is surfing the disruption, as opposed to expecting the new normal.

When you're surfing, you're looking out and you don't know where the wave is going to come from, they usually come, you know ... you don't know what direction it is, you know how big it is, until it gets there. There might be the wave you've been looking for all day, or you might never get a great wave.

So, there might be a return to some of the things that happen, but the better bet is to say it's going to be fundamentally changed. How do I prepare myself? How do I prepare my business for constant disruption and constant evolution? That's way more important than then trying to land the new normal.

When the global financial crisis happened in 2008, there was a move to people, you know, about a 1.5 x move to platforms - meaning that's how fast people moved to it. People are saying with this ... experts I've heard the field say this is a four-to-five times faster move into platform and digital. So, if you're in the process right now with COVID catching up, you're in trouble. I would tell you that the better thing to do is to look at everything you're doing and try to leapfrog. So, you might have to leave some things on the table. You might have to leave the way you've worked behind you. But jumping forward over this is incredibly important. What platforms can you use? How can you leverage existing digital technology? As opposed to worrying about building out what yours are. If you're trying to build something, you're already behind. The best thing is to move into something as fast as possible and make that leapfrog happen.

## **COLLISIONS WITH IDEAS**

So, we know innovation happens at collisions. Two different people coming together, two different ideas happening. The history of innovation always happens when there are these t-shaped moments that cause intersection. So, all of that kind of lockdown thing that's happening is incredibly difficult to innovate in. The format that I've had, and what I've been pushing people to do, is something I call 'discover the other' – which means: how can I find out new people to talk to? One of the easy ways to start this is look at your LinkedIn, or if your company has their own type of social media, find someone that you barely know that just one degree that you might have met at a conference sometime in the past. And ask them for a 30-minute conversation and you spend 15 minutes talking about how they're doing and finding out what's happening, you spend 15 minutes telling yours. And then each of you ask for another person to meet. And just do this once a week it's 30 minutes, once a week – really easy. But what that does is, it's causing you to have conversations with somebody that you've never met before. You got to have these conversations and keep running into people, because what will happen is, you'll have a conversation with someone, like: "you know, you should talk to this person". And when that happens, and you're opening up, potentially new lines of business because of that.

Obviously, one of the key trends is that's accelerated during COVID is that we're seeing people successfully have a distributed workforce: work from home. Also, if you have digital relationships, those are really important. But I think it's also something I call 'the truth of the T-shirt', which is now that you see people in their own setting in their own homes and have their kids running around the bed, or a dog running around, you understand who they are as a person and I think it's an important thing. I think if we take that lack of hierarchy, lack of bureaucracy forward with us, you're going to be a much flatter organization and much better for it.