

# In the Know.

## The Man Behind The Fitness

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 In the Know.  
with  
Matt Appleby





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## My background

My background is in IT and financial services, where I spent almost twenty years building a career. I was always good at what I did, but it never truly fulfilled me. I often struggled to achieve the right balance and my health suffered as a result.

Around twelve years ago I discovered yoga, which set me on a path of self-discovery. It ultimately led to me changing direction in my career and my outlook on life. Coming from the corporate world, which can be quite stressful, yoga helped me to recover from poor physical and mental health.

A huge life lesson came in 2016, when I suffered from burnout. Back then, I was working full time, I had just become a father, and I was immersed in an intensive training course to become a yoga teacher. It was a dark time, but it made me realise that I needed to make some big changes in my life. It took me a long time to recover, and whilst doing so, I decided my future lay elsewhere. Whilst I returned to IT for a brief period, I soon quit corporate life and I began to teach yoga in 2017.

## My fit20 story

I was a customer of fit20 before becoming studio owner at Fox Valley in 2019. I joined my first gym at sixteen,

and throughout my late teens and early twenties I didn't really know what I was doing and I definitely over-trained. Towards my late twenties, I'd learned much more about fitness and focused on functional sport-specific training. When I discovered yoga and Pilates I changed my approach to training yet again.

After becoming a father in my mid-thirties, I quit the big box gym that I was a member of. As I was training to become a yoga teacher, I felt that I didn't also need to work out at the gym. Given that it took me a couple of hours a few times a week to get there, change, and actually do a workout, before showering, changing again and driving home—time spent in the gym was a luxury I didn't have as a new dad.

Still wearing rose-tinted glasses (yoga was all I needed, right?!), a couple of years passed. As I was going to be a dad for the second time, I went to buy a new car seat for the baby; however, I found that I couldn't pick it up without struggling. It dawned on me that despite being very active and 'fit', I had definitely lost strength in that relatively short space of time. I didn't know what to do about it—I certainly didn't have the time or inclination to take up a regular gym membership again.

I joined fit20 in 2018 as a customer and achieved great results within just a few months. Whilst I was

a little sceptical at first, it ticked all the right boxes for me. It's innovative, time-efficient strength training with expert guidance. It's very safe and alignment focused. My strength improved a great deal, as did my energy levels and posture. I was soon able to pick up both my kids at the same time, which felt great!

I am so grateful to have discovered fit20 at just the right time. As I approach my forties, I've never felt stronger. The programme is a real game changer!

fit20 is a wonderful compliment to regular yoga practice and the most mindful way I've come across to train for strength. When I saw how well it could work alongside my yoga practice and teaching, I looked into the business opportunity. I became studio owner at Fox Valley in 2019 and haven't looked back since.

## Why fit20 is different

At fit20 we adopt a 'less is more' approach to strength training that perfectly fits my philosophy around teaching yoga. Society and social media portray a different picture about what we 'need' to do to keep fit—always encouraging more, 'no pain, no gain'. At fit20, we're changing

perceptions around how best to remain fit and healthy.

The real appeal for me was fit20's consistency and holistic approach towards training for health and longevity. You become fit and stay healthy—for life.

We're different from regular gyms on a number of levels. We adopt an efficient and effective evidence-based method that delivers great results. We push you a little further each week, ensuring progressive and consistent improvement.

fit20 training is ideal for busy people, seniors, amateur athletes and those who dislike sports or gyms. We help a broad range of people—from women in their fifties, to busy executives and small businesses who all train together. The common factors amongst our members is that they lead busy lives, they really value our professional coaching and, above all else, they love the results they achieve that enable them to live healthier, more fulfilled lives. Real results are achievable with just one high-intensity training session a week.

The best thing about fit20 is that it eliminates all the excuses for doing high-quality training consistently. And consistency is key! It works because our members love the convenience

of the training and the personal attention they get during each and every session.

Our members generally begin to feel better within a few weeks. They notice stronger muscles, improved cardiovascular fitness, and a better posture and body shape. In short: they have more energy and stamina to go about their daily activities.

I'm grateful that we haven't had to make any changes since reopening the studio after lockdown. The way we train already meets social distancing requirements: sessions are always by appointment, and they're carried out on a 1:1 basis under the watchful guidance of our expert personal trainers in our private, members-only studio. It's more like a laboratory than a gym and one of the safest environments available to train in.

The fit20 workout offers complete training: it's both preventative and curative. It not only strengthens your overall health and vitality, it specifically helps to improve your ability to fight viruses and protects against the impact of infection and disease.





# Fit In 20 Minutes Per Week!



We invite you to make an appointment for a completely **FREE**, no-obligation introductory fit20 training session.

## Look at these amazing benefits!

- **Just one 20-minute training session per week**
- **Your own personal trainer**
- **A regular weekly session time**
- **No need to change clothes or shower**
- **Noticeable and measurable results within 3 months**

Enter your details on the our webpage at [www.fit20stocksbridge.co.uk/free-training/](http://www.fit20stocksbridge.co.uk/free-training/)

We will get in touch with you within one working day.  
*Please be sure to complete all fields marked with an asterisk (\*)*



# A Revival Of Chess Via The Queen's Gambit

The Queen's Gambit, a Netflix original series, has achieved phenomenal viewing figures since its release—62 million in the first month alone.

There's a tipping point when popular culture begins to move under its own steam. Though marketing, advertising and promotion fuels the success of a film, programme, book, computer game or other such entertainment product during its early days, once it a certain level of notoriety is reached, FOMO takes over (that's Fear Of Missing Out, don't you know). Everyone who hasn't digested the content in question wants to find out why everyone else is talking about it (well, there has to be some reason to account for the global success of 'Fifty Shades of Grey').

When you discover that the focus of The Queen's Gambit is chess—a game traditionally enjoyed by 'geeks' and intellectuals—you could be put off. But not so those who have enjoyed the series regardless, which has received buckets of praise from the general public and critics alike.

Chess has suddenly become sexy—something that TQG's dazzling cinematography and lavish outfits no doubt helped to portray.

Those who were committed fans of chess before TQG was even filmed are also fans of the series. Many have lauded its

accuracy (which is due to chess Grand Master Garry Kasparov's influence during production); they appreciate that the series has not only made the game look cool, but that it has also shown its complexity and how it offers a real challenge.

As a result of TQG's success, the game has seen a revival. Chess clubs across the world have attracted new players in their droves, and eBay reported a 273% increase in the number of searches for chess sets in the first ten days of the series' release.

Chess is one of few pastimes that can be enjoyed during a national lockdown, a factor that may have also contributed to its sudden popularity. The seriousness surrounding competitive chess and the level of skill involved, portrayed well in TQG, may have helped to dispel some of the negative assumptions that traditionally surround the game... that it's boring, it's a game only for boys, or something to be played by people with no social lives.

The latter is definitely not true—chess has helped people socialise during the pandemic. Families and friends have taken to playing each other online, using FaceTime to see each other's moves and involving two boards, like the way the game 'Battleship' is played.

Few television programmes have such an impact on the hobbies and passions of viewers away from the screen. It helps that the 'language' of chess is understood worldwide. Some countries place as much pride in their national chess team as they do other sports—particularly Russia and Eastern European provinces, an element that again is covered in TQG. Many schools already have their own chess club, though experts believe the number of these will increase once extra-curricular activities are once again allowed to take place.

There are many reasons why The Queen's Gambit has proved such a success. The marketing of the series and how the story has been visually presented are undoubtedly major factors, but these things are made much easier when you have some cracking content to begin with. And whilst chess may not sound like the most fascinating subject to cover, the court of public opinion, for one reason or another, has deemed it so.

And why not? Maybe we're just sick of alien invasions, zombie apocalypses, westerns and romcoms. A change is as good as a rest, as they say.





# Will Charities Benefit From Corporate Donations This Christmas?

Think of the money spent on corporate Christmas parties... hiring a room, the cost of food, and footing the bill of the open bar—these are all typical elements of most corporate Christmas parties, in order to celebrate a great year. Even a small business will endeavour to treat its employees to a Christmas meal at a local eatery, as a thank you for their hard work.

A corporate Christmas in 2020 will look very different to other years. Even if the current national lockdown is lifted on December 2nd as planned, it's unlikely that hospitality venues, once they reopen, will be able to host large parties.

The organising of a Christmas do usually begins in September, if not sooner. Competition for dates near Christmas at popular venues can be fierce, so securing one is key. With so much uncertainty surrounding a second wave, however, few corporate party planners went ahead in the autumn and booked a venue—and even if they did, most will have received a refund of their deposit by now.

It does seem that the way we typically celebrate Christmas with our colleagues will simply not be an option this year. Whilst employers can still treat their employees with a gift, it's the tax deductible nature of a Christmas event that appeals to many bosses.

Some businesses, of course, will welcome not spending hundreds/thousands on a Christmas party, given how much profits have been impacted by the pandemic. Not everyone, however, has had a bad year. Depending on the sector or type of business, some firms have had a great year from a financial perspective, and it's these who may be looking at ways to reduce their tax bill as a result.

Why not donate what would have been spent on your company's Christmas party?

The campaign 'Xmas Party Heroes' is highlighting this issue and encouraging companies to contribute their Christmas party fund to a charitable cause of their choice. Not only will these businesses be doing good with money they would otherwise spend on others anyway (i.e. their employees), such a donation will also qualify for 19% tax relief.

Firms such as Timpsons, Barratt Developments and The Landmark Group (whose CEO, Mark Hawthorn, was the brains behind the Xmas Party Heroes' campaign) have already pledged their donation of their company's Christmas party budget. Says Hawthorn, "There will be lots of unspent Christmas party budgets this year and this campaign offers a really simple and effective solution that many businesses may not have considered.

"I only had the idea a week ago and after making a few calls to sound it out, I've been inundated with people wanting to get on board. The reaction so far shows there is the potential to raise tens of millions of pounds for charity."

Victoria Russell, Director of Property Alliance Group—another company pledging to donate—added, "Charities need support more than ever in 2020 and Xmas Party Heroes is a great way to raise a significant amount of money and awareness.

"The Covid 19 pandemic has hit disadvantaged communities the hardest, with increasing numbers of children and young people that would not have previously been identified as vulnerable, now moving into thresholds of higher need. Unemployment is increasing, loneliness, food poverty, issues relating to emotional health and wellbeing, are all on the rise, which create additional demand and pressure on public services. It's great to see so many businesses getting behind this idea and helping to raise much needed funds."

It's an idea that could spread into households. Despite the government's claim that we should be able to spend Christmas with our wider family and our friends, some people are vowing to remain in their bubbles for the festive period, particularly if they have family who are shielding.

Giving gifts to loved ones is a part of Christmas. If you won't see the recipient's

joy when they open your gift because you can't be together, does that take away the enjoyment of gifting? If the answer is yes, why not ask your loved one if you could donate to a charity in their name as a gift—then you can both feel good about doing good.

Given the impact the pandemic has had on some people's income, a commercial Christmas certainly isn't on the cards for everyone. Instead of getting into debt to create a Christmas that's filled with gift after gift, it may be an idea that, at the end of this unprecedented year, it's much more appropriate to help someone else with a small donation instead of striving to match what you normally spend under different circumstances.

If this year has taught us anything, it's that 'things' don't matter. People matter. During the coronavirus crisis we've seen many acts of kindness. Captain Tom was knighted for his incredible fundraising, which was one of many thousands of similar selfless acts. Yes, there may be doom and gloom all around us, but donating to a charity (however small) offers a chink of light during an otherwise dark time for someone on this earth who truly needs help.



# The Thing To Covet In 2020...A Home Office

With so many people forced to work from home during the national lockdown and beyond, because of Covid-19 and social distancing regulations, the desire for a dedicated space has risen exponentially.

The luckier amongst us may already have a home office or spare room that can easily be given over to this purpose. There are many more, however, who don't have this luxury, and whose living space is already overrun.

Whilst working from the kitchen table is doable in the short-term, for those employees whose companies are formally incorporating some form of homeworking into their roles, it isn't exactly suitable for a prolonged period. Dining/kitchen chairs aren't ergonomic like office chairs (there has reportedly been a real shortage of office chairs for UK consumers during the last few months, such as has been the demand for them). Clearing away work-stuff every day for dinner isn't ideal either.

Though the number of people moving house has burgeoned during the latter half of this year, not everyone can afford to, or wishes to, move. Homeworkers in this position have instead looked at ways to maximise their space to fit in a workstation and the other paraphernalia they need to carry out their work.

John Lewis's Flexible Living Report 2020 has shown that 28% of its consumers have repurposed an existing room to create a space to work from. More than just an area to sit at a desk, a separate

room is top of most homeworkers' wish list, so that they can close the door for privacy during phone calls/Zoom meetings, and also to provide a physical boundary between work life and home life.

According to reports, sales of bunk beds have grown rapidly, probably so that a bedroom can be freed up to create a home office. Some homeowners have ordered or built summer/garden rooms and adapted these into offices, with a few tweaks and upgrades, such as incorporating an electric supply, broadband access and a heater.

Where a room in the house can't be partitioned and is multiuse, homeworkers have purchased noise-cancelling headphones; sales of which have increased by 30%.

The spending of homeworkers hasn't just been limited to equipment. Apparently, John Lewis has seen a rise in 'statement pieces', i.e. art, bookcases, ornaments, etc. that look good on camera for all those Zoom calls. I completely understand that.

I'm straying off topic here, but I must admit, as a regular viewer of BBC breakfast each morning, and after seeing some of the bland homes/corners of their many correspondents' homes, it's made me appreciate my own tastes in house décor. I've seen so many boring rooms, home furnishings and rubbish 'artwork' over the last six months from that programme; if I was going to be on camera, I'd certainly make sure I was filmed in front of something

far more interesting than a plain white wall bearing a mahogany-framed print everyone and their dog has got.

Home offices have not just been a necessity for employees. The number of parents in need of a separate space to home-school their children has seen a similar demand for home offices or the repurposing of rooms, so that they could make the distinction to their children that 'home school' wasn't simply crafting or family time at the table.

The number of loft and basement conversions has risen over the last few months, too, as people look to their extra storeys for available space. Both solutions not only address the home office issue, they also add value to a home when the homeowner opts to sell. Some homeowners have even capitalised on the spare space in the eaves of their garage, creating exterior access via a staircase to reach it.

It's clear that a home office is the most coveted aspect of home décor and renovations at the moment. It's also clear that people can be quite inventive in their quest for a separate space.





# Gaining Peace When Working At Home...

Whilst it's more physically convenient to work from home—no commute, no micro-managing boss breathing down your neck, no office politics or dress code—it does come with its challenges. During this national lockdown, a significant portion of the population will be working from their home office, spare bedroom, kitchen table, garden shed... whatever. And, as so many of us will be doing this, it's quite possible that you won't be the only adult working from home. Throw in the number of schoolchildren who are currently isolating because someone in their year group/class bubble has contracted the virus and you may find entire households holed up.

I get that a busy workplace is anything but quiet, but it's rare that a colleague will want to sit on your lap and show you what they've drawn with their crayons. Neither will your boss insist you walk the dog or put a load of washing in. And the hustle and bustle of an office environment doesn't quite grate on your nerves as much as the Peppa Pig theme tune when it's the fourteenth time you've heard it that day.

**So, how can you get any work done when everyone and their dog is also in the house?**

**Be flexible with your working hours**

Whilst you may be more used to a 9-5 working routine, exercise flexibility when working within a busy household. Get up an hour earlier to get some work done or complete work tasks in the evening when the kids are in bed.

**Don't see it as 'extra' work** – take the time back during the day for family time. It may slightly blur the boundaries between work and play, but if in that early or late hour of work, you're ten times more productive because you can fully concentrate, it's worth considering.

Concentrate on your output and the quality of your work, rather than how many hours you're sat at the computer. A homeworking environment is not the same as the workplace, it's much more fluid. As long as the work you produce is of the same calibre, it shouldn't matter how or when in the day that work is done.

**Childcare sharing**

If you and your partner are working from home, don't both try and work at the same time if you can help it. Why not work in the mornings whilst your other half entertains the kids in another part of the house, then swap over in the afternoon whilst your partner gets some work done? Again, look at it as quality work over quantity; though you would probably both work more hours if you were at your computers at the same time, you're unlikely to be as productive if you're interrupted every two minutes by your little ones.

Obviously, if there's a childcare solution outside of the home via a childminder or grandparent/family member within your bubble, that's a better solution all round—but this may not be an option for everyone. If you have to juggle childcare with working, and your partner does, too, take it in turns if your deadlines allow this.

**Have your child 'work' too**

If you're sole carer, and you have a task that simply has to be done, ask your child to go to work with you. Set them up a workspace in your office, or at the kitchen table, and pack their lunchbox as if they were really joining you at your workplace. Give them a pad of paper and some pencils and get them to write a letter to your boss that asks him/her to give you some time off to play. Stress that the more colourful the picture/letter, the more time your boss will let you have off 'work' to play with them. This will at least keep them quiet for an hour or so (the snacks will help!). Knowing that they will get your attention after 'work' will be a huge plus, though you must follow up with a shared play activity afterwards to reward them for their patience and behaviour, and also so that they will be inclined to play this game again when you next have some work to do.

**Use a digital babysitter**

Parenting gurus would have my hide for suggesting this, but when you absolutely need to get some work done, there's no harm in settling your kids down in front of the telly/tablet and putting on their favourite film for an couple of hours. These things just have to be done sometimes. If it keeps you in a job and a roof over everyone's head, Supernanny will surely forgive you.

**Turn off notifications**

Maybe you don't have young children to distract you, but your technology threatens to do so. It's easy to spend an hour or so surfing the web or checking your social media profiles if you're prone to procrastinating over tasks you're not keen on.

Technology should serve you. There's always an off switch or a way to turn off notifications on any phone, laptop or tablet. Work offline if you can, at least until the task is complete.

**When anything is more exciting than work**

When I work from home, household tasks manage to look exciting all of a sudden. I'm a born procrastinator, and when I become disengaged with my work, putting some washing on or emptying the dryer is suddenly a joy not a chore. I can busy myself for hours rather than simply sitting down and getting on with the task at hand (I don't have this problem in the workplace). There's a book entitled 'Eat That Frog', which suggests you treat the tasks you like least as a priority. Like a sticking plaster, grit your teeth and just pull it off! Get these tasks done first, then it's downhill for the rest of the day (you may even fly through your work and enjoy some spare time!). Commit to just 15 minutes doing the task you're trying to avoid; you'll probably find that, when you actually begin to tackle it, you'll choose to continue, rather than break off after quarter-of-an-hour.

**Headphones**

You may have a household that's happy to entertain itself, but which is the loudest home on the street whilst doing so. If this is the case, invest in a pair of noise-cancelling headphones. Problem sorted.

**A formal workspace**

You may not have the option of adding a home office to the layout of your house, nor the funds/space to build one in the garden. Whether you're working from your bedroom, the kitchen table or a corner of the living room, keep it as orderly and organised as possible.

It will be much more difficult to get on with your work each morning if you have to shift tons of toys, or if you're scrabbling about for that very important paperwork that was only in your hands yesterday. Take the extra time at the end of the day to pack up properly, putting work in folders, etc. so that everything has its place. Not only will it look better, your mind will feel less cluttered, too.

What tips could you share with fellow homeworkers that have made a difference to you?

**Tweet us at @intheknowemag**



# Lockdown Eased, Shops Reopening

It's been confirmed that the lockdown will ease, to some extent, on December 2nd. Though we will return to the tier system in a bid to combat the spread of Covid-19, most retailers will be able to open their doors for the Christmas rush.

Knowing many SME owners, I'm sure this will be a relief. This year has been harsh enough, without missing out on the trade that Christmas brings. For some, this can represent 25% of their annual takings.

With only a small window of opportunity to gather gifts for our loved ones, there's the chance that retail outlets will become packed like a tin of sardines for the three weeks of shopping time before the big day comes. That's not good for our health when we've been socially distancing from people all year.

Some shops, such as Marks and Spencer and Primark, have extended their opening hours to compensate. Whilst this seems a very kind thing to do for us poor shoppers, I'm not naïve enough to believe that this is the only reason. Having missed out on forecasted profit throughout the rest of the year as already mentioned, longer opening hours gives these shops a better chance of reaping back lost revenue.

Those amongst us who are better organised may have already done their Christmas shopping online, especially those who feared the national lockdown would continue past the beginning of December. Given how much our consumer habits have changed, this could be how most people gather their Christmas gifts together from now on, which isn't good news for our High Streets.

A consumer expert advised shoppers to find quieter times to shop once the restrictions change. However, plenty of people worked through the second lockdown and will continue to do so up to Christmas week—these people will have no choice but to go during traditionally busy times, such as at the weekend, if they wish to visit a retailer in person.

Queues outside was one method retailers employed to manage the number of customers within their premises at any one time during the summer. When it's warm and relatively nice weather, it's not much of a burden to wait your turn outside, but it will be a different story during December. Will retailers be willing to spend money on awnings/rain-guards/outdoor heaters to keep their clientele happy if they're queuing outside to come in? Given how much these same retailers will have already spent in 2020 on PPE, signage and Covid-friendly shop fittings to meet regulations, during a year of low (or no) profits, no one would blame them if they didn't.

Until a vaccine programme has been actioned/rolled out, it's a risk to even step outside your front door at the moment, let alone join swathes of people in a packed-to-the-rafters retail outlet. It's a risk some people will still take, however, to be able to get their Christmas shopping.

The sensible thing is to order online, but as we all know, support for bricks-and-mortar independent businesses is desperately needed if they're to survive. A conundrum indeed.

**What's your take on shopping for Christmas 2020?**

**Tweet us @intheknowemag.**

# Instagram Backlash

Social media giant, Instagram have come under fire for their most recent update to the app.

Like many social media platforms, Instagram likes to make regular updates to their app to keep it fresh, relevant and keep their users on the platform. However, Instagram has come under criticism thanks to their latest update.

Two features in the new update have made it harder for users to upload their content, by replacing easy to locate buttons with a shopping button, and a reels button. Many content creators have spoken out about how they feel Instagram has turned more into a money making machine rather than supporting creators, while others say it is trying to take on TikTok by dedicating a whole new section of the app to Reels.

They have replaced the tab on the bottom screen from seeing whos interacted with your content, and instead changed it to a shopping tab. Many people feel this tab was strategically placed there as the tab was originally the first place people would go to check how their content was performing.

If you don't know what Instagram Reels are, please feel free to check out our article all about it here. - Please link to my instagram reels article

Instagram boss Adam Mosseri knew that the new update wouldnt come without criticism, and was quoted saying "We don't take these changes lightly – we haven't updated Instagram's home screen in a big way for quite a while".

Only time will tell whether Instagram takes onboard users feedback and updates the app, or whether they leave it as it is. Either way, we know there are divided opinions on the new update, and we want to know your thoughts.

**Let us know what you think @intheknowemag**



# Hope That The New Vaccines Will Bring An End To The Pandemic

Only a few days ago we learned that a vaccine from Pfizer could represent a solution to the coronavirus pandemic. Though its route to market has been speedy to say the least, clinical trials—so far—have proved promising. On Pfizer's heels are a couple of other vaccines, namely those from AstraZeneca and Moderna, which are also showing more than a 90% success rate.

What difference will this news make to people?

For some, this will be a huge positive. Those who are shielding due to having pre-existing health issues may see a vaccine as the key to re-joining society. Small business owners, if they manage to hang on until the vaccination programme is rolled out, will see it as a chink of light in a dark time, as they may soon be able to serve customers without fear of further lockdown or limiting restrictions. As for the general public, it's likely that some will see the vaccine as an end to all the upheaval and social distancing regulations we've had to abide by since March of this year. At the outset of the pandemic, few of us could have foreseen how much our lives would alter, and how long the virus could potentially be with us.

There will be some people for whom the news of a vaccine will not be a cause for celebration. Given that vaccines usually take years before they're deemed safe and are licensed, how quickly it's taken to create this vaccine may unnerve some people, who will be rightly worried of its long-term effects years down the line. There's also the portion of society who don't agree with the idea of a vaccine for this virus, for whatever reason—one being that it's part of a government plan to control us. Whatever your beliefs, and

whether you'll participate in the eventual vaccination programme, this news has given hope that there will come a time in the not-too-distant future where our lives may return to some sort of normalcy.

Some aspects of the pandemic may stick with us for a long time—some of us may continue wearing our masks when out in large crowds of people, for example; regular hand-washing and the application of hand sanitiser may also remain part of our daily routines.

What I personally hope returns, because a vaccine has made it safe again, is physically touching others. I'll qualify this before you begin to think certain things of me...whilst I've never considered myself a touchy-feely person, I always hugged my friends goodbye after spending time with them. I don't hug my parents or siblings (I wasn't brought up doing so, it would feel weird). My girls, being older now, don't appreciate a hug very often (though I hugged them plenty when they were younger), and my other half definitely isn't a 'hugger'...which means the hugs I shared with my friends were the only ones I got. And I've missed them—my friends and the hugging!

I adored seeing my friends before the virus hit, and I really want to be able to hug them hello or goodbye. It's weird to stand two metres away from them when we have been allowed to mix and just say 'well, bye then' when we go our separate ways.

For those people who are touchy-feely, what I'm experiencing must be magnified a thousand times for them—and it must be awful. I've seen videos of adult children trying to hug their parents who are

residing in care homes via 'plastic arms'; or them just being deprived of any physical touch altogether as they talk through a screen or window. If you're used to hugging those you love, and they don't live in the same household, this virus has taken something away from you. I can only hope the vaccine will give it back.

For some people with elderly parents in care, the arrival of the vaccine may come too late to enjoy one last hug with the people who brought you into this world.

That's one of the saddest things I've ever written.

I have some reservations, from a safety point of view, about the new vaccines. On balance, if it means returning to the life I had, I don't care if I'm controlled by MI5 or I turn blue, I'll take it. I'm not one of those people who has loved lockdown for all the things they've been able to accomplish and all the time they've had spare. I've only had three days off throughout this entire year and I get cabin fever after just a few hours in the house; for me, it's been a difficult year that has been full to the brim of work but no play. Compared to the year some people have had because of this terrible virus, however, I know I have much to be thankful for.

The hope that these vaccines will put an end to what we've experienced in 2020 is enough of a benefit for now. That thought will help us get through the cold, dark winter and what could be a compromised, lonely Christmas. Roll on 2021.





# Domestic Abuse And Older People

There's a lot been written about the rise of domestic abuse during a period of national lockdown. Back in March 2020, trapped with their perpetrators when society practically shut down overnight, those suffering domestic abuse had fewer avenues of escape until the government made it clear that escaping injury or harm was a valid reason to leave home.

That this legislation was created didn't make it any easier for sufferers of domestic abuse to seek help. If you've ever experienced domestic abuse, you'll know that leaving is not as simple as simply packing a bag and going. Many women and men, when escaping such a scenario, have to make decisions that don't just affect them. Leaving could affect their children's lives and stability, their children's education and each child's relationship with the perpetrator. Sufferers may not have anywhere else to go that would constitute a roof over their head; leaving their home may also impact their job and how they earn their income. It's a lot to consider.

When we think of a relationship that involves domestic violence, we perhaps imagine a relatively young woman being abused by a man. However, domestic abuse can involve a woman abusing her male partner, and same-sex relationships are not immune, either.

Gender is only one aspect, age is another. For instance, it's not always parents with young children who can become victims of domestic violence.

A report by Age UK has highlighted the number of older people in domestic abuse situations. Currently, only those aged 75 and under are included in statistical data under the Domestic Abuse Bill. Whilst we don't automatically imagine older people being victims of such abuse, the Crime Survey for England and Wales reports that, during 2018/19, approximately 180,000 women aged between 60 and 74 were deemed to be so.

According to the same survey, if the death of an older person is caused by another human being, 46% of the time this is likely to be at the hands of the victim's partner or spouse. In 44% of cases, the people responsible for subsequent death is the victim's adult children or grandchildren. Domestic abuse can include financial abuse and the undermining of a person's self-esteem. Statistics show that older people take twice as long to seek help if they become a victim. Mobility issues, illnesses such as dementia/Alzheimer's, and a person's living arrangements, may see them dependent on their perpetrator(s). They may also feel a huge amount of shame that they suffer such abuse at the hands of a family member, which could also prolong the situation.

It's less likely that a sufferer of domestic abuse over 75 years of age would have workmates or friends that they could confide in about how they're being treated. In their report, therefore, Age UK urges third parties to be vigilant, e.g. GPs and other medical personnel, staff at the bank where the victim has an account, and those who carry out personal services, such as hairdressers or chiropodists.

Because the Domestic Abuse Bill fails to acknowledge that people over 75 can be sufferers, specialist services are faced with a challenge in identifying elderly victims and survivors. According to the Age UK report, "Services are not effectively targeted at older victims, and do not always meet their needs." Gathering data is crucial. "Older people are not a homogenous group of people ... (if) data on equalities characteristics (age, gender, disability, ethnicity) is collected ... this will inform how we support older people experiencing domestic abuse."

The coronavirus pandemic has only made things more difficult for sufferers of domestic abuse, whatever their age. The virus, seemingly, is not going anywhere, and neither is the move to protect older people from domestic abuse without a change to the Bill.





# Health and Safety Tips For People Working From Home

Many of us have had the experience of working from home during 2020 because of the pandemic, and employers have seen the benefits of such an arrangement. So much so that some companies are permanently incorporating the flexibility of their employees being able to work from home whenever they wish.

At home, though, there's no HR department on tap or Health and Safety Officer to consult concerning your work environment. It's still important for your physical and mental health that your home office set-up is appropriate, comfortable and practical wherever possible.

**Here are our tips that will help you achieve this:**

## Your work environment

Set up a dedicated area that affords you enough space to work. Think about where best to position your PC, paperwork and any other equipment you need, so that it's close to hand. Make sure you have enough space to work comfortably; bonus points if you have somewhere private and free from interruptions.

## Assess your set-up

Carry out a DSE (Display Screen Equipment) assessment if you use a screen for an hour or more a day (whether a laptop, desktop computer, tablet or smartphone). Your employer may arrange a Virtual DSE assessment with a Health and Safety Consultant or they may simply ask you to carry out a self-assessment. There's a great checklist on the HSE website (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/ck1.pdf>) that you can work through yourself.

**Some of the main points to consider when setting up DSE include:**

- Do you have enough space to set up your equipment comfortably?

- If you use a laptop, do you have a separate keyboard and mouse that can be positioned to suit your needs? Your arms should be level from the elbows when typing and your mouse in easy reach.

- Is the top of the screen level with your eyeline? Can the screen be positioned far enough back on the work surface to allow use of your keyboard? Is the screen large enough to be read? Can you tilt and swivel the screen so that you can see it clearly? You might want to consider adding a second, larger screen if working from a laptop.

- Do you have adequate lighting? Is the room bright enough for you to see your work? Is your screen positioned so that it's free from the glare of windows, lights and reflective surfaces?

- Is the chair you use suitable for sitting in for long periods? Is its height adjustable so that your forearms are horizontal, and the top of your screen is at eye-level? Does it support the small of your back? Can you place your feet flat on the floor (you might need a footrest for this)?

**Remember to take regular breaks if you use a screen when working.**

You should also move around at least once an hour, which is a great excuse to get up and put the kettle on!

## IT Support

Working from home can involve the use of unfamiliar software or systems, in order to access the various networks you may use on a daily basis. Make sure you understand how these work, and if you don't, ask your employer for some training.

If you run into difficulties with your IT equipment, make sure you know who to contact for help. Difficulties with IT can be a major source of stress, even more so if you're working from home and don't know who to turn to for assistance.

## Communication

A big downside to working from home is the risk of loneliness. It can be difficult to still feel part of a team. Poor and infrequent contact with your boss or teammates can lead to high levels of work-related stress.

Arrange to regularly check in with your colleagues; or, if you work on your own, buddy up with other sole workers. Looking after your mental health is as important as looking after your physical health, so make sure you keep in touch with people. If you spot a colleague becoming a little withdrawn reach out to them to see if they need any support.

There are some valuable benefits that come with working from home, such as no commute, a lack of office politics, and a freedom/flexibility to choose your own hours. Following the tips above will ensure you complete your work in as safe a manner as possible.



# Building Foundations For Your Business

For many businesses, particularly small retailers, the lead up to Christmas can be extremely busy.

It's easy to get caught up in the festive rush, with customers demanding products and services as gifts for their loved ones, and your own preparations for the big day itself.

If you don't look after your health during such times, it could become a problem. Imagine: if you fell ill, it's likely that you'd have to pay someone else to do your work for you, to avoid disappointing your customers.

This time last year I came down with an illness that lasted six weeks. I think it was brought on because I hadn't been looking after myself and I'd taken on too much work. It took me a long time to recuperate, as I tried to work through it to still meet my Christmas orders. Looking back now, if I'd just taken better care of myself, I'm sure I would have recovered more quickly.

Yesterday, at a networking meeting, a contact talked about building foundations and gave some really good advice on the matter.

When we build foundations for our business there's a process we go through. We work on many things, such as sales processes, the product, advertising, etc., but at what point do we think about

our health? If our lifestyle is not so good, this will eventually affect our business.

Some good advice was passed on, concerning the three foundations for our health.

What water can do for us

Many of us get through the working day by consuming numerous cups of tea and coffee; however, drinking water is much better for us. It helps maintain a healthy digestive system, it supports greater mental performance, and it keeps the skin clear. Our bodies are made up of between 45-75% of water. Working from home, in our nice warm houses, we can dehydrate easily—we need to keep hydrated and our water levels topped up. The European Food Safety Authority issued a report in March 2010, which suggested an adequate daily intake is 2 litres of fluid for women and 2.5 litres for men.

We're designed to move

It's also important to get regular exercise. The temptation, particularly in winter, is to laze around on the settee and eat lots of junk food. As I write this and look out of my dining room window the sun is shining. It's a beautiful day for a walk.

Exercise also boosts mental health. We should aim to get away from our desks every so often, even if it's

just for 15-30 minutes during our lunch hour. If we did this on a daily basis, it would equal 3.5 hours of exercise a week, which will help to eradicate any weight gain and stop diseases, such as diabetes.

Get some slumber

Finally, sleep is so important. If I don't get enough sleep, I feel like a zombie. We should aim to get around eight hours a night, though I appreciate how difficult this is for many of us at the moment, due to lockdown.

Aim to stop using your phone at least one hour before you go to bed. Keep to a regular bedtime and try to make your bedroom as relaxing a place as possible.

A lack of sleep can result in a bad mood and can affect our overall health. NHS.uk states that regularly suffering from poor sleep could put you at risk of serious medical conditions, including obesity, heart disease and diabetes, as well as shortening life expectancy.

So, the next time you're tempted to take your phone to bed to catch up on a few work messages, or to take that last minute order, think about how it could affect your sleep—and, ultimately, your health.

You only get one life, so look after yourself.

# Unemployment Creates New Opportunities

Despite what the national press wants us to believe, it's not all doom and gloom out there at the moment. Being positive about the world around us at this current time will help everyone mentally cope with the situation we're in.

I'm getting some great vibes at the moment, from what I see and hear in the business community. Businesses are adapting and new businesses are being created all the time.

Despite the fact we're living through a pandemic, people are still setting up on their own. The situation many individuals have found themselves in has created a big shift in both the job market as well as in the business world. I always say, where there's a downturn, look for the opportunities.

Recently, I spoke with a contact of mine, who told me that they've seen loads of new businesses launched and people seeking finance to get their venture up and running quickly.

Businesses that are unable to adapt are making staff redundant. Some ex-employees are utilising the skills they already have to set up in business for themselves.

For every job advertised I imagine there are hundreds of applicants currently. When competing against many candidates, your chances of success reduce. You

need to make a good impression. The problem may be that you're perceived as too old, over qualified, or not great in interviews. If this is the case, why not take what you're good at and create your own business?

I'm not saying that everything will be a walk in the park. I run my own business and put in many hours, but the job satisfaction I receive, and the knowledge that I'm working just for me and my family, rather than lining someone else's pockets doing the same thing for them, more than makes up for this. Then there's the flexibility. I can work from home, do the hours (within reason) that I want to do, and take on clients I want to work with.

I'm fortunate to have the best of both worlds. I'm employed in a job I love, as well as running my own business. This allows me to use my skills creatively in different ways and keeps my mind active. Many people now find themselves working part-time with a need to supplement their income in some way.

So, if you find yourself in the unfortunate position of being made redundant, look at it as an opportunity to try something different. Think about what you're good at and how you could make a business from it, then go for it!



# Marketing: It's Personal...

If it isn't personal, it should be. Think about it, if you own a company that sells beauty accessories and cosmetics, will you have the same audience as someone who provides balaclavas?

It's possible, but unlikely. Someone who is looking to cover 85% of their face because they're a hunting, camping or paintballing enthusiast is not necessarily the same person who would be keen to purchase fake eyelashes and eyeshadow palettes—at least, not at the same time.

Rather than chase the people who may want what you offer every now and again, spend your time chasing the beauty aficionados who will buy your product on an almost daily basis.

There are hundreds of different marketing tools and strategies out there, and what works for one company may not work for another. And, when promoting a product, how you measure the success of your campaigns will differ, too.

## **A personalised PlayStation strategy**

Not every company encourages you to buy what they offer. Some actually make it very difficult for customers to part with their money (this is definitely a personalised approach and not a tactic every business should use, for a number of reasons). To actively deter customers from buying your products can create an air of decadence and exclusivity, which, for some brands, can increase demand exponentially.

The PlayStation 5 console has just been released as I write this. Whether deliberate or not (and I assume it is, given the marketing budget and annual profits Sony has to play with), Sony has only released a small number of them to retailers. The ensuing panic amongst parents to secure a console for their offspring for Christmas has been widespread. The winners, of course, have been the entrepreneurs who bought up the little stock available to sell on at vastly inflated prices.

When Sony eventually releases the next batch of consoles onto the market at the RRP, there will be thousands upon thousands of people begging to buy them—and perhaps some people who didn't even know they wanted one, until they realised they may miss out on what is the must-have console of the year.

Had Sony simply sent their entire stock of consoles to retailers in one go, do you think there would have been as many people going crazy for them? Probably not...so, well played, Sony, well played. Though, if you're one of the parents striving to buy a console this side of Christmas, you may be more inclined to describe the company's marketing strategy as frustrating... Small businesses find it difficult to be as strategic as Sony with their marketing. They don't necessarily have the time, budget or experience to be able to forward plan huge campaigns, as their time is gobbled up with fulfilling orders and firefighting. As a result, the content they put out tends to be scattergun and sporadic, empty and one-sided, and it only serves to show the brand exists.

Certain aspects of marketing can be a case of trial and error. However, if the little time you do manage to carve out for promotion just feels like you're shouting into a vacuum or talking to random people who may or may not be your audience, why do it at all? If you're too busy to target your content, measure its effectiveness and learn from its actual results, there's little point bothering in the first place. Remember: it's better to master just one method of marketing than incorporating a number of techniques and strategies and carrying them all out poorly.

## **Think about Maud**

Spending just a little time personalising your marketing will be worth the effort. Have a good think about what it is that you offer, and who would benefit from/use/love it the most—and, most importantly, why you've come to this conclusion.

For example, why would Maud, aged 70, in retirement, with a passion for making and amending her clothes or crafting, buy your sewing machine over your competitors'? Which features of a model will she enjoy in particular, or does she just want a simple machine that does what it says on the tin? What's her budget likely to be? How much space in her home will she likely need in order to use it effectively? What could she produce, what end results could she see? How easy are the instructions for her to understand? Lastly, and probably the most important question with regards to your marketing...how will Maud know that you have this super-duper sewing machine for sale? How can you bring it to her attention? What questions will she have about laying out the money for such a purchase that you could qualify in your advertising?

If you personalise your adverts to your target customer(s), like in Maud's example, you will be spending your time and marketing budget wisely. You won't be throwing a handful of sales messages into the air, hoping they find the right people when they fall back to Earth; you'll be effectively informing a buyer who wants what you offer that you have what they're looking for. Whatever the tool, whatever the technique, whatever the platform, this represents effective marketing.

## **Would you like help personalising and targeting your marketing efforts?**

**Call 07983 575934 for more information.**



# **ITK** In the Know.



## **ITK** Podcast

### Check out our latest In The Know Podcast on YouTube.

This month we sat down with Becky Hanson of Unimax Solutions.

Brett and Becky discuss the difficulties of running a business during the pandemic and delve in to the world of CRM and how it can benefit your business.

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