

NEXT STEPS OUT OF THE STORM: We hope that those of you who logged in found the webinar 'Next steps out of the storm – moving from crisis management to strategic growth' useful? Thanks to James Saunders, a Partner at Moore Kingston Smith, for hosting it, who was joined by his colleague Jamie Sherman, Partner – Strategic Growth Services at the firm.

Offering their thoughts as business owners were Claire Burroughs, Managing Director of Ansacom; and Robert MacGregor, Managing Director of Corinthian Benefits Consulting – both businesses of which have bases in Tunbridge Wells.

Jamie said that now is the time for business owners to 'steal a march on the competition' and he explained that to do this they should be reviewing their strategy and focusing on business development.

He said that at Moore Kingston Smith, the initial action when lockdown was announced was to make sure that the team was OK.

"We've always had a 'people first' strategy here, so that was at the forefront of everything," he explained. "After that we had to make sure everyone could work from home and ensure that our IT infrastructure was in place to do this. Since then we've continued to talk to our team and have carried out regular 'pulse surveys' to gauge how they are feeling."

Jamie said now businesses should be taking the time to 'plan, plan, plan' and 'set smart objectives'; talk to their clients to see what they need; and to make sure that they have the right real-time information to hand for cash, costs and pipeline orders etc.

Claire Burroughs from Ansacom – which provides a call handling service – said that looking after staff was the first priority.

"I've become more of a manager over this time," she explained. "We have given our colleagues 24/7 access to counselling but what I have noticed is how everyone has pulled together; not one person has complained and our absence rate has never been so good!"

She added that, as a business owner, she has never been 'so aware of our cash flow'.

"I've been forced into managing my costs so much more efficiently than I used to. That, along with the various loans and grants available, has helped us to weather the storm," Claire continued. "Lockdown has kicked me into action and it's made thinking about what I want next from the business moving forward a priority. Live chat has taken off and we've taken on a new member of staff dedicated to that facility. Currently

though our focus is on supporting our hair dressing clients, who simply can't cope with the amount of calls they are receiving!"

Robert from Corinthian Benefits Consulting said that he was spending a lot more time reviewing his business strategy, looking at spreadsheets and making use of a cash flow modelling tool.

"When lockdown initially hit, I thought back to a documentary about SAS training I'd watched," he said. "The recruits were thrown into freezing waters and were taught that the only way to survive was not to panic, to be as calm as possible – pause, breathe and make a plan. That's how I approached the situation."

He agreed with Jamie that talking to clients was key.

"I wanted to make sure that they were able to keep using our services," Robert explained. "If they said they were struggling, then I offered them the opportunity to defer fees for six months."

He added: "This period has seen us transforming the business and using technology far more to enhance what we offer."

Robert concluded by agreeing with the rest of the panel that people were his firm's 'most valuable asset'.

"We know that we'll have some work to do to help our team back to normality," he said. "What I've noticed is that some of our younger team members are still living at home with their parents. When we talk to them they are obviously in their bedrooms. This means that they've been using the same space to sleep, work and probably socialise with their friends online at this time."