

The Difference Between 'The Probable' And 'The Possible' And 'Doing The Right Thing' In A Socially Responsible World

The world is having to find ways to keep its populations, employees and families safe and secure - pre, during and post - any kind of disaster.

From the incredible and unpredictable impact of mother nature's natural disasters, to the sadly inhumane and planned terrorist activity affecting the world's major cities – an increase in the focus on health and safety, risk, compliance and so importantly - disaster recovery - has become a critical success factor for every individual, family, company, supplier and stakeholder.

On a corporate level, the global communities of local, national and international companies and authorities are having to consistently review their policies and procedures. They are having to teach their teams how to navigate the outcomes of these extremes, and of course, everything and every eventuality in between.

Whether it is one life or 100 lives, the same process of understanding what could/should have been done to reduce the risk of a disaster happening (whether terrorist, natural or human error) is a must. Of course, the scale is different and the impact more intense with higher numbers, but the importance to educate and protect is just as high.

Understanding and evaluating 'risk' is the primary activity. Putting in processes after the fact is not ideal in any situation, but trying to get global teams ready for any eventuality, is also nigh on impossible.

A colleague of mine pointed me to VUCA. As the Oxford Leadership piece on VUCA, by Pablo Tovar states; 'One of the key failures is to lead us to find what is probable rather than what is possible. The VUCA environment means that we must focus on what is possible (because anything can happen) rather than on what is likely to occur (which is determined by what happened before).'

Firstly, what do you focus on? What is the priority? What are you trying to protect? And how much is it going to cost to 'do the right thing'? Should we start on the past disasters to learn from or should we at least have an eye on the future problems.

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The cost and emotional impact of the loss of life in the recent Grenfell disaster in London has been incredible. If there is anything to be learned/gained/gleamed from this horrific experience, that was captured so vividly on social media, is that since this terrible event, every high-rise building, (especially in the UK), is now undergoing rigorous checks; and that the suppliers of materials that maintain and create these structures are now under huge scrutiny. This is potentially one of the most expensive health and safety activities – but one that will help people to feel safe and secure while they sleep or work – this is priceless.

This challenge doesn't stop here, we watched the local entities trying to handle the amazing, generous and constant volumes of 'goodwill' that arrived at the doorstep of the disaster (while it was still happening) that could never have been anticipated. Grenfell was an 'overnight' disaster, and the SOP on 'how to handle the goodwill of fellow humans' maybe didn't exist, or if it did, it was neatly filed away in a folder in the offices that were closed and that then re-opened the following morning in shock, while the magnitude of the actual event was becoming a reality.

The global teams tasked with planning for or managing people through challenging situations have their work cut out for them. Disaster recovery and having your teams understand the 'possible and probable' situations they may find themselves in should be part of everyone's ongoing training and development.

Keeping people, property, and assets safe and secure has always been a high priority, along with company intellectual property and data. You only have to read a corporate contract to understand where the company focus is. The contract pages covering insurance (and having the relevant cover for every eventuality) is now a key feature; and the relatively new cover of cyber and data protection has changed the landscape dramatically in the last 10 years. It's hard to estimate cyber and data protection versus the cost to insure a building. How do you estimate the risk to the business - if it has been disabled due to a cyber-attack?

Data and the new laws coming into effect in May next year (2018) with regards to the storage of personal data, will have incredible consequences on anyone that ever takes a piece of information from a traveller or assignee, and subsequently passes this data down through their supply chain. We are responsible for understanding how our suppliers, (who are handling relatively sensitive information every day on our behalf) can negatively impact on our own business - if they do not follow the same rules and regulations as of May 2018.

The relocation industry, hybrid agents, pure agents and aggregators, in fact, any company that is highly reliant on third party services, will be impacted. This change in legislation will demand higher levels of security and compliance, and a re-look at how everyone in the organisation (and outside) is dealing with personal data. This understanding is not just the responsibility of the IT team, it starts at the top of the organisation, and will need to work through all levels to ensure every team is taking a proactive approach to this new normal.

Has risk now fully overtaken corporate social responsibility in the boardroom? Or have they joined forces? If you look back seven years, the environment and 'all things green' trended high. And, as I hoped and anticipated, being green has become part of everyday life rather than an opportunity to increase business flow through marketing. I personally wanted to 'go green' but wasn't open to constant CSR messages while I was 'off duty' - I wanted the world to be conscious and sustainable, but I also wanted my own personal downtime.

But, does downtime really exist in 2017? The terror attacks on our global citizens, the sleeping people in the beds in Grenfell, the families, individuals and businesses living and working in Houston (that are now reeling in the wake of Harvey) – these people were not 'on-duty', they were just living. The responsibility to stay focused, alert and aware, even in our everyday lives, has now become part of our being – and to survive and keep safe – it's the only option.

Everyone has to take time to think, discuss and debate, future 'world' risks. These can be individual, local, national or global.

Alex Keatinge, my first general manager at Marriott International, advised me 'in EVERY situation you find yourself in, ALWAYS think and consider the BEST possible outcome and the WORST possible outcome. IF you can cope with the WORST possible outcome, then you are going to be okay'. Taking this advice, I have always concentrated on coping with the WORST outcome'. It's at this point that I start researching, planning, learning and preparing ... every mistake we make is an opportunity (or gift) and I do look for the ghosts in the corridor – it's this advice that

has helped me navigate many challenging situations and certainly helped my personal growth from an entry level associate into a strategic global MD (who is still learning...).

My passion as one of the founding members of ASAP (Association of Serviced Apartment Providers) was to legitimise the industry. I invited QiT (Quality in Tourism) who were part of Visit Britain to help develop the first official rating system for serviced apartments. QiT began to officially evaluate everything from the bedside tables to the core requirements of health and safety. I am truly delighted that this continues to be the key focus of the association today and is one of its most prevalent core values – in fact, if the member is not accredited in the next year, they will no longer be able to wear the ASAP badge.

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As a global agent, we use the template formed by the association to help all our suppliers globally to increase their awareness around the core requirements of health, safety and security of guests, even if they are not yet part of an association.

But what else?

At our most recent TAS Alliance meeting in July 2017, the agenda focused on disaster recovery and risk. Unknowingly, (but instinctively), the meeting followed Pablo's advice on developing our habits on learning to evolve and improve how we handle different levels of complexity on these subjects, following some simple but challenging themes. We ensured that we:

- Asked different types of questions
- Took on multiple perspectives
- Developed a systemic vision
- Looked at the whole picture; took a step back to see what's possible.

It is amazing when you pull together some of the brightest and opinionated people in

the industry that handle operations and sales every day, just what incredible 'common sense' and creative ideas can rise to the surface. The TAS Alliance was a vehicle for discussion and debate, and the attendees successfully delivered the thought leadership.

Each individual, family or team have to have 'bought into' and 'connected with' the accepted habits or framework around your HSSE and the thought processes around it both at home and at work. But remember to always consider the 'possible' as well as the 'probable'.

It's important to understand the boundaries that any individual, family, company or organisation is happy to go to. When a disaster happens, it's rare that you get time to engage with every individual and ensure they are empowered to make the right decisions confidently that reflect the personality of the group – when (and if) a disaster happens, we have to rely on the fact that our teams, be it our family, network or employees already share our values, common sense and ethos to 'do the right thing'.



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