

## 7 TIPS TO PREPARE NOW FOR WHEN THE NEW NORMAL ARRIVES...

I've been in extended isolation before. Nine months of temperatures hovering around minus 35 degrees, lack of privacy, the mundane nature of the days and the interpersonal pressure of living with 17 other people was extraordinary. I had prepared and trained well for this environment and we had a great year. What I wasn't prepared for however, was coming home.

I truly believed we would slip right back into normal mode, and did not plan for the many challenges that, for many of us, we will now experience returning from this extended lockdown.

### 1. **Sensory overload - Take your time slipping back to the office if you can.**

After spending extended periods indoors the noise and smells outside are really strong. On my return from Antarctica the simple noise of a city was a huge cacophony for me. **Go back for a morning or afternoon through the first week or so and ease into it.**

### 2. **Speed - Try to slow it down by continuing what worked for you in isolation.**

Traffic, physically going from one meeting to the next, rushing out for lunch, managing school pickups, sport or study commitments. It's all very fast and intense. **A morning walk, meditation, yoga, simply looking at the sky, whatever worked then will work now.**

### 3. **Choice - Play the long game and plan.**

Things may have become simpler because we have had limited choice. But suddenly the doors of choice are thrown open - and the list is endless. Where to go on the weekend, who to visit, what sport or concert to attend, what to wear to work. **Plan which days you will visit people, go out to dinner, and give yourself time to acclimatise to the sudden choices.**

### 4. **Expectations – Manage other people's expectations by setting your own.**

In total we were away from home for 18 months – I was thrilled to be back and over the moon to see my family and friends. But my most overriding feeling was exhaustion and a need for privacy. Today, people will have different expectations about how we respond on the other side – some will be thrilled to be back to a new normal, others will be scared, some ambivalent. **Ask people how excited they are about the new normal on a scale of 1 – 10 and notice the difference.**

### 5. **Physical contact – To be back in the world being touched and hugged again may be challenging. That's perfectly OK.**

A year without so much as a hug is difficult, but you do get used to it. I simply shut down the need for physical contact and put it out of my mind. For many people we have faced a similar challenge now. For single people living alone, and not being able to visit family and friends, it may have been months without even a handshake.

### 6. **Redefine your Rituals – for yourself and your team**

This is the ideal time to review and even re-set your team culture. What rituals will you keep from the past? What new rituals will you have in the future? A few tools I used with my Antarctic team that I have kept since returning include:

- **No Triangles** - which simply means, I don't speak to you, about him. You don't speak to me, about her. **Have direct conversations, and don't get yourself involved.**
- **Lead without a title** – every person can demonstrate leadership at work and at home; it's a behaviour not a title. If you see something that needs to be done, do something about it. **Take some pressure off yourself by encouraging the people around you to step up.**
- **The Bacon Wars** – raise any niggling issues in a calm, professional manner. **Deal with them and put them to bed.**

### 7. **Mental Health – Have regular conversations with the people you care about, and those that care for you, so we can normalise conversations around mental health.**

We don't know how people will respond over the next few months. But we do know people will react in different ways. In Antarctica, we had a language – "NQR = not quite right". It was a shorthand code to describe that feeling when you just aren't feeling your normal self. Overall, you're doing OK, but just today you are not quite right. **Check-in regularly, whether it's a code, a scale, or a word, make it easy for people to let you know if they are doing it tough right now.**