



Q & A

THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACED BY ENTREPRENEURIAL BUSINESSES IN THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CLIMATE

**Arrowpoint
Advisory**

Rothschild & Co
Wealth Management

Arrowpoint Advisory and Rothschild & Co Wealth Management recently hosted an online event, exclusively for female business leaders and entrepreneurs. We heard from Stephanie Dobrikova, CEO of Ascenti and Tracy Baumfield, Director at Reed & Mackay, both successful entrepreneurs who have built their careers over time by leading internal improvement projects in order to grow their business' organically or through Private Equity backed buy-outs.



Stephanie Dobrikova, CEO of Ascenti, the leading provider of physiotherapy and selected clinical outsourcing - helping thousands of people to elevate their health and live active lives.

How did you approach lockdown when the first warning signs appeared and the gravity of COVID-19 became increasingly more evident? How much planning could you do or at least attempt to do?

SD: We planned an awful lot. We put together a team which brought together experts from around our business and people from all different parts of our operations who started thinking through different scenarios. This resulted in a very comprehensive risk framework that took a staged approach to shifting the business into virtual working, taking advantage of our digital healthcare partners. So we did a lot of planning, thought about it deeply and it helped a lot. It was an incredibly intense period. I would say that the way that lockdown came around in the end, no one could have quite predicted, so it was still a bit of a surprise.

Tracy, Reed & Mackay is a successful business travel company and the pandemic has had such an enormous impact on the travel sector. What were your initial thoughts when we started to go into lockdown back in March?

TB: We'd already started to see that there was an effect because business travel and the demand was already starting to soften. So if you like we had we had some sort of warning ahead of time, and we were well prepared. What also helped us was the fact that we were over 1,100 employees around the world and were all enabled to work from home, apart from a very small fraction of the workforce. We pioneered homeworking 25 years ago when it was virtually unheard of because our team are all dependent on technology. In our time, the business has encountered fairly major events such as 911, SARS, etc. and

we've always had what we call a rapid response team. We've had these big shocks within our business before, but never has anything been this long and protracted, and particularly even during the 2008 financial crisis. So in summary, yes we saw softening, but people still needed to travel. So in terms of planning, I guess we cheated, because we've planned for this kind of thing before.

You mentioned that whilst you've experienced similar events in the past, that this is this feels fundamentally different. How do you feel this will change the landscape for your business?

TB: It's already changed it massively. We built the business over 30 years to be a billion dollar turnover business and now we're tracking at about 5 million. So it's quite a dramatic shift. Predictions from most of the industry sources is that travel is unlikely to return to pre-COVID levels until about 2024.

Teamwork is one of the business strengths that has proved essential in navigating the pandemic and in terms of the importance of good leadership, how difficult has it been for you to manage and motivate staff remotely? What tools did you use to engage with your workforce?

TB: We put together a plan to roll-out Microsoft Teams and we set up teams within the teams environment so that they were cross-functional. When you are in an office, a lot of what you do becomes osmosis and nobody has to really think about it, so it was important to try and replicate that at a virtual level.

SD: We took a very similar approach to Tracy and tried to almost over communicate. I think morale is a real challenge. We took an approach of people will never forget how you treated them through the pandemic. So even if it was a difficult decision, it was about being very clear about why a decision was being made. Trying to give clarity in the current climate is probably one of the most difficult things at the moment, but openness and honesty are key to ensuring your employees understand what's going on.

In what's fast becoming an increasingly competitive marketplace, Stephanie, how do you give Ascenti that edge that you need?

SD: There's a phrase that we often use in our team, which always makes me smile a bit, but it's kind of true, 'winners focus on winning, and losers focus on winners', you've got to think

“WE BUILT THE BUSINESS OVER 30 YEARS TO BE A BILLION DOLLAR TURNOVER BUSINESS AND NOW WE’RE TRACKING AT ABOUT 5 MILLION. SO IT’S QUITE A DRAMATIC SHIFT. PREDICTIONS FROM MOST OF THE INDUSTRY SOURCES IS THAT TRAVEL IS UNLIKELY TO RETURN TO PRE-COVID LEVELS UNTIL ABOUT 2024.” Tracy Baumfield, Director of Reed and Mackay

ahead all the time, and not focus too much on what everybody else is doing. We've become a leader in digital healthcare and you have to be really careful, especially in digital, about what you actually invest in. There's an awful lot of things that in our market have seemed really innovative and quickly become a commodity that's no longer that exciting. Ultimately, we are a people business, it's about having the best people, the best and most dynamic culture, the highest energy. The one where people feel like, I can give a lot, I can succeed and grow and it's exciting to work here. Those are the things that make you a special place to work and one that can really make your business stand out.

TB: I also agree with Stephanie's point, don't spend too much time being distracted by what the competition is doing. Instead, always ask your customer where they are going with their business. By shifting the focus you'll get the insights that lead you on to develop your own business to meet the customer need. And ultimately, that's all you're in business for, your customer.

This article is intended to provide an overview of the event. To request the video recording, please contact Rosemarie LaManno.



Tracy Baumfield, Director of Reed and Mackay, they deliver corporate travel management for professionals with exacting needs.

With a combination of inspired service with state-of-the-art technology to create a level of travel management like no other.

About us

Arrowpoint Advisory is the dedicated lower mid-market team of Rothschild & Co in the UK. We provide expert M&A, Debt and Special Situations advice to publicly-listed, private and family companies, entrepreneurs, sponsor-backed businesses and management teams, investors and lenders.

Rothschild & Co Wealth Management provide a comprehensive range of Wealth Management services to some of the world's wealthiest and most successful families, entrepreneurs, foundations and charities. We advise our clients in relation to all their financial and non-financial wealth.

For further information, please contact us:

Karen Dawaf Harron
T: +44 7901 666 735
E: karen.dawafharron@arrowpointadvisory.com

Katharine Taylor
T: +44 7894 251 304
E: katharine.taylor@rothschildandco.com