DIGGING DEEP
On the Regeneration Economy

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EMISSIONS TRANSITION WITH CLEAN BC
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Trust, resilience and community in times of crisis

HELLO from the Gustavson School of Business—or rather, hello from one of the hundreds of home offices where the school’s work continues during these difficult times. I hope that this magazine finds you and your families safe and healthy. And to those who are hard at work providing essential services, I thank you sincerely for your efforts. I applaiyed all for your resilience and adaptability as we contemplate the future.

Exactly how COVID-19 will impact our world over the coming months is uncertain, as is the exact form recovery will take. Now is the time, however, to consider what type of world we want to rebuild so that it is better than before. The pandemic is exposing and exacerbating many fault lines in our society and those will need to be addressed as we contemplate a changed reality.

Within the university, we are planning for a fall semester of learning and research, and supporting our students from home. We are developing new ways to take the online education experience from a necessary substitute to a delivery model that is exceptional in its own right. We are working to retain the engaging and interactive classroom experience that you would have enjoyed at Gustavson. These may not be the spring and summer semesters any of us anticipated, but the skills we develop during this unprecedented time will stand us in good stead for a future of virtual working and collaboration.

Not everyone affected by the pandemic has been able to face equally well. Some organizations have weathered the impact of COVID-19, while others have struggled badly. Some have engendered positive goodwill, while others have come across as self-serving. To capture consumer feelings about different business responses, the organizations have weathered the impact of COVID-19, while others have struggled.

The pandemic is exposing and exacerbating many fault lines in our society and those will need to be addressed as we contemplate a changed reality.

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More than ever, let’s stay connected and build our common affinity, skills and experience. If we can do so, we will come out stronger and more resilient than we were before this started.

Dr. Saul Klein
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Mark consumers down as skeptical

by Krista Boehnert

MARKS THE SIXTH YEAR OF THE GUSTAVSON BRAND TRUST INDEX STUDY, which tracks Canadians’ trust in consumer brands. Like most things in 2020, the research team was thrown a curve ball in March when the impact of COVID-19 fully hit Canada. Initially, the team had gathered data from consumers during the weeks of January and February, tracking the trust in brands across a variety of dimensions, including functional trust (how well the brand performs its task or service), relationship trust (how well the brand handles consumer interactions) and values-based trust (how well the brand embraces sustainable and socially responsible practices). Just as the team began to analyze the data in early March, the country’s economy was put on pause and Canadians’ daily lives changed drastically in the wake of the pandemic. In response, the brand trust research team quickly mobilized a follow-up study to gauge any changes in consumer trust of brands that found themselves in the crosshairs of the pandemic, such as delivery services and hotels.

In both surveys, Canadian trust in consumer brands is on the decline. For some brands, like Amazon, the drop in trust is stark, even as we find ourselves more reliant on its services during the pandemic. In 2019, Amazon dominated our specialty retailers category, scoring third among brands for delivering on their promises and fourth on its services during the pandemic. In 2020, Amazon was thrown a curve ball in March when the impact of COVID-19 fully hit Canada. Initially, the team had gathered data from consumers during the weeks of January and February, tracking the trust in brands across a variety of dimensions, including functional trust (how well the brand performs its task or service), relationship trust (how well the brand handles consumer interactions) and values-based trust (how well the brand embraces sustainable and socially responsible practices).

In an ever-changing environment, one thing is certain: consumer skepticism is on the rise. Companies which are able to gain and retain consumer trust will thrive, while those unable to overcome this hurdle will face steep challenges ahead.

The full results and analysis of this year’s surveys are now live at uvic.ca/gustavson/brandtrust.
We are living through a health crisis and a confidence crisis. We are also experiencing an economic crisis that has crippled businesses, destroyed jobs, and caused financial hardship for many Canadians.

The key word to describe the current situation is uncertainty. We are at the start of a global recession, but how long will it last? The optimistic case is that Canada’s economy will bounce back swiftly with a V-shaped recovery in 2021, but the more likely scenario is a protracted U-shaped recovery. We may also experience multiple waves of infections and economic shutdowns, or a W-shaped recovery.

The recovery hinges on the widespread availability of a vaccine, better treatments and broad testing to provide reliable data to guide decision making.

I break down the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis into three phases:

**PHASE I: STOP THE PANIC IN FINANCIAL MARKETS**

As the pandemic spread to North America and the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic on March 11, we saw a jarring drop in stock markets. The Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX) Composite Index, which peaked on February 20 following an 11-year bull market, fell as much as 47% by March 23. The sell-off began on March 2 with a drop of 12%—a post-war record—followed by a 15% rise the next day, followed by another 10% drop. This volatility has not been seen before. Both the price of oil and the exchange rate for the Canadian dollar versus the US dollar fell sharply. The major US stock market index—the Standard & Poor’s (S&P) 500 Index—also fell by as much as 38%. To provide some historical perspective, the S&P 500 Index fell by more than 50% during the Global Financial Crisis from late 2007 until early 2009, then took 49 months to recover that loss.

The Bank of Canada (BoC) cut its overnight policy rate by 150 basis points to 0.25%, and intervened in fixed-income markets to restore liquidity and to provide emergency funding. Canada’s government announced fiscal support of $200 billion through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) and many more fiscal stimuli programs. These actions supported confidence and put a floor under the stock market and the economy, halting the panic.

**PHASE II: ENDING THE GLOBAL LOCKDOWN**

Based on the initial forecasts from epidemiologists, up to 25% of the population was forecast to contract COVID-19 within several months, overwhelming hospitals and leading to thousands of needless deaths unless strong health measures were taken. Heeding this advice, Canada’s lockdown began mid-March with advisories to shelter at home, practice physical distancing, avoid non-essential travel and avoid gatherings of more than 50 people. As public confidence collapsed, the Bank of Canada (BoC) and Government of Canada took dramatic actions to support the financial markets and the real economy. The BoC cut its overnight policy rate by 150 basis points to 0.25%, and intervened in fixed-income markets to restore liquidity and to provide emergency funding. Canada’s government announced fiscal support of $200 billion through the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), the Canadian Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) and many more fiscal stimuli programs. These actions supported confidence and put a floor under the stock market and the economy, halting the panic.

**PHASE III: RECESSION AND RECOVERY**

Phase III is a recession (which is certain) and a recovery (which is uncertain). The IMF has provided two sets of forecasts. Advanced economies are expected to drop by -6.1% over 2020, followed by a recovery of +4.5% in 2021. The comparable forecasts for emerging markets are -1.0% and +4.6%, respectively. The range of uncertainty is huge in any chart you might see on this subject. Confidence is a big part of that. If people believe things are getting better, their behaviour could make it a self-fulfilling prophecy.

**WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF UNCERTAINTY?**

Unknowns, entitlement, consumer and business spending, behavioural changes, consumer demand for things like restaurant and travel, bankruptcies and unemployment—all these things could affect the shape of the recovery.

What is certain is that government debt levels will increase, creating a drag on the economy for years to come. Canadian federal debt levels are around 50% (with provincial debt pushing it to 100%). Past frugality and balanced budgets gave us the room to support our economy now. The US federal debt is set to surpass 100% of GDP—a level not seen since World War II. The only way to pay down this debt is higher taxes and/or lower spending. So higher taxes and lower spending are the possible stories for the economy in Phase III. Either way, frugality and balanced budgets will be required to pay off the huge debt that we have incurred to support our health system.

**MARKETS**

Stop the Panic in Financial Markets

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**Phase I:**

**Stop the Panic in Financial Markets**

As the pandemic spread to North America and the World Health Organization declared a global pandemic on March 11, we saw a jarring drop in stock markets. The Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX) Composite Index, which peaked on February 20 following an 11-year bull market, fell as much as 47% by March 23. The sell-off began on March 2 with a drop of 12%—a post-war record—followed by a 15% rise the next day, followed by another 10% drop. This volatility has not been seen before. Both the price of oil and the exchange rate for the Canadian dollar versus the US dollar fell sharply. The major US stock market index—the Standard & Poor’s (S&P) 500 Index—also fell by as much as 38%. To provide some historical perspective, the S&P 500 Index fell by more than 50% during the Global Financial Crisis from late 2007 until early 2009, then took 49 months to recover that loss.
ON EARTH DAY WEEKEND in April 2012, Judy Rom, BCom ’10, put her passions online. Based in South Africa at the time, Rom was working in digital marketing and noticed a new movement on Pinterest. A search for keywords online showed a steep upward trend for upcycling terms. The graph, she says, showed “a hockey stick of growth. My partner and I decided that weekend to build the first version of the Upcycle That website.”

Today, from her base in Vancouver, BC, Rom uses her agency background to fulfill roles as Upcycle That strategist, project manager and creative director. She is part upcycling inspiration curator for the masses, and part brand consultant. Through Upcycle That, she magnifies the reach of upcycling to more than 25,000 viewers per month, around the world.

Her aim is to be the premier online destination for upcycling how-to and inspiration, showing individuals and companies that upcycled products can be something to aspire to.

“I want the website to be more than me and my ideas. I want it to showcase the best in the world.”

She collaborates with upcyclers globally to activate solutions to brand waste, curating a trove of ideas from the practical (what to do with your old sweaters) to the cheeky: need a bed frame? Try a truck bed. The DIY showcase on Upcycle That reflects two different approaches to upcycling.

“You can start with the raw materials you’ve got and figure out what you might make with them,” she explains. “For instance, tire inner tubes or clocks made from tuna cans. Or you can decide what you want as a final product and then source the materials. Brands are becoming more aware of environmental costs, and they have more scope than ever to look at upcycling.”

Rom has applied both approaches for a variety of companies. In one example of deciding on the final product and then identifying a supply chain, a favourite project of Rom’s celebrated the 150-year-old Bacardí family business’s new logo and packaging. She designed two liquor cabinets that would showcase their new bottles and produced tutorials so their customers could replicate the projects on their own. One incorporated skateboard decks as shelves and the other housed the bottles and accoutrements in a vintage steamer trunk.

Other businesses use upcycling tutorials as part of their customer engagement strategies. For example, Safestore, a self-storage business in the UK with a series of upcycling blog posts, shared Judy’s tutorial about converting an old phone into a lamp.

Next for Rom is more work with firms with the goal of promoting upcycling on a global scale. “Brands are doing more than most consumers hear about. They have corporate sustainability reports, but it’s not easy for them to make that real for their stakeholders. Upcycling is a very visual way to tell that story.”

Creative storytelling—like Rom’s videos tutorials—brings the potential to life for consumers. When people do upcycling projects themselves, they experience firsthand what it means to turn waste into something valuable. It’s a moment of alchemy.

However, Rom doesn’t believe that everyone necessarily needs to have more stuff. For her, the latest twist in the transformational tale of trash to treasure lies in closing the loop. Maybe that means using what you’ve got in your kitchen drawer or storage locker to make something that you already know you need, or it’s wanting a coffee table and finding the scrap wood in the garage: knowing what you’ve got and what you need, and putting the two together.

“My favourite project is always what I’m working on now,” Rom says. “I’m always using different materials, trying different projects. With upcycling, we’re usually doing things for the first time. We’re pioneering techniques; we’re finding the beauty that lies in waste.”

Rom’s creativity and passion for sustainability have always been simmering; her time at Gustavson helped her realize how she could apply these interests in ways that would be compelling for businesses. Her business and sustainability course with Professor Monika Winn helped her realize how to frame sustainability to appeal to business. This ability to talk about upcycling and related concepts in terms of the bottom line has helped her greatly in her consulting life.

As a business, upcycling can be a challenging model; the products are often more expensive because of the time that goes into reworking them. All of the elements that go into running a first-mover business with unspecified supply lines and short timeframes call for intense and sustained creative energy.

Luckily, as Rom says, “Creativity is a renewable resource.”

Photos: Courtesy of Judy Rom

Creativity transforms goods from used to useful
by Rachel Goldsworthy

With upcycling inspiration, old sweaters and used wine corks get new life as a seat cover and tiny homes for plants.
EMISSIONS TRANSITION

Exploring CleanBC and the provincial government’s plan for climate action

by Natalie Bruckner

“2020 is an interesting midpoint for us, as we have 10 years of carbon neutrality behind us and a 10-year out-goal to reduce the emissions of our public sector buildings by 50 per cent and our public sector fleet by 40 per cent. Both are ambitious goals, especially considering a large component of our fleet (e.g. medium- and heavy-duty vehicles) don’t have many zero emission options commercially available at this time.”
Climate Change Strategy focuses on three areas of work: carbon measurement and reporting, which includes emissions across all public sector organizations, and managing and supporting those organizations in understanding their carbon footprint; the purchasing of carbon offsets to ensure we have them in inventory and that we have the appropriate number of offsets at the soil of the year, so we can demonstrate carbon neutrality; and developing policy and support measures to help drive us towards our public sector climate goals.

While this may sound rather complex, Koski and his team have very clear goals, as set out in the CleanBC plan that was released in December 2018. The plan was developed as a pathway to achieve the province’s legislated climate targets of reducing GHG emissions by 40 per cent by the year 2030, based on 2007 levels.

“2030 is an interesting midpoint for us, as we have 10 years of carbon neutrality behind us and a 10-year outlook to reduce the emissions of our public sector buildings by 50 per cent and our public sector fleet by 40 per cent. Both are ambitious goals, especially considering a large component of our fleet (e.g. medium- and heavy-duty vehicles) don’t have many zero-emission options commercially available at this time,” Koski says.

For Koski and his team, this means identifying pathways to reduce emissions from the buildings and fleet that span provincial ministries, Crown corporations, health authorities, advanced education institutions and schools across the province. No small task, especially considering this impacts more than 120 organizations.

However, Koski is both optimistic and realistic: “Achieving these reductions is going to be a challenge, especially doing it at an affordable price point for the province, but the team is doing an exceptional job of providing well-researched options and clear advice to decision makers on difficult issues that involve making trade-offs.”

Working in this realm has its many challenges, one of which is continuing the education to create a shift in thinking.

“While addressing carbon emissions is now a common part of the conversation around tables (or, more recently, in virtual meeting spaces), we need to consider the risks posed by a changing climate when planning our investments. Our decisions today need to be consistent with both our low-carbon goals for buildings and transport and climate conditions that have already shifted and will continue to shift over the coming decades.”

Koski adds that to enact real change, accountability and transparency are key. “BC has taken an interesting approach in the Climate Change Accountability Act [Bill C-224]. Each year, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy is going to have to share a report on the progress that’s been made and how program dollars are allocated and have been spent, where the gaps are and where we are going.”

“For those who might want to do their part but aren’t involved in the government’s building and fleet portfolio, there’s always the option to lead by example. Koski enjoys the environmental, health and financial benefits that result from commuting to work by bike, adopting a largely plant-based diet and driving electric.

Koski offers anyone interested in entering the climate change field this advice: “I recall the dean at Gustavson spoke with us about increasing your tolerance for ambiguity. At the time it didn’t make much sense, but what I now understand it to mean is: you won’t have perfect information all of the time, and it is hard to be successful if you expect clear answers before acting. You have to move forward using the information you have, and this applies to the critically important decisions we as a society need to make in climate policy.”

Business Class: Welcome to Gustavson.

Joanna Tong: Thank you, I’m so pleased to be here.

BC: What brought you across the Atlantic to our school?

JT: Values, both the school’s and my own. There’s a really strong alignment there, which prompted me to uproot myself and make the big move from Cambridge to Victoria. What attracted me the most about Gustavson is that it’s a very values-driven school. I found the culture very engaging, approachable and collegial. The focus isn’t just on what an individual achieves; it’s about the people around us, the impact alumni, faculty and business have on society and the world, and really prioritizes international, cross-cultural business; sustainability; innovation; integrative thinking; trust and responsible leadership – all those are very timely issues in today’s fast-changing environment. So I feel the programs, the research, the initiatives the school stands for, fit very well with my personal values. The school is a recognized leader in those areas, and it’s pleased to take on an even greater role on the international stage; and I’m excited to contribute my own skills to bringing the school to the next level.

BC: What would you define as your areas of expertise or passion?

JT: Personally, I have a great passion for social enterprise, sustainability, higher education and leadership development. It’s very rewarding to see students and alumni fulfill their potential beyond the classroom and make the world better. It is an interesting time too for leaders to adapt their leadership style in an increasingly diverse and international business environment. Both are important and fascinating areas.

I also have deep international, cross-cultural experience. I studied Chinese in Beijing and have an open mind about communicating and exchanging ideas with people from around the world. At the same time I’m mindful about the cultural nuances.

And that ability allows me to relate to people from different countries. I would really love to help our school bring its international relationships to the next level. I’m very keen to engage with our international alumni; although physically distant, they are a crucial part of the Gustavson community.

BC: What conversations are you most looking forward to having with alumni and other stakeholders?

JT: I would so value the insight of all our alumni, and look forward to engaging with them in future. Obviously, travel is on hold for the time being, so meeting in person will unfortunately have to wait; but I would welcome any of our graduates to connect with me virtually in the meantime, whether it be opportunities to connect with business leaders in their communities, ideas to engage philanthropists to support the school or simply to say hello.

BC: What is your personal philosophy?

JT: Inspired by Albert Einstein: ‘Try not to be a person of success, but rather try to become a person of value.’

BC: What do you do when not hard at work?

JT: In my spare time I run half-marathons very slowly, play piano with no audience allowed and I’m trying my hand at writing fantasy fiction.
Exploring the regeneration economy

by Sasha Milam

BUSINESS CLASS: How would you define ecological knowledge, and why did you start by studying how organic farmers use it?

SAEED RAHMAN: Ecological knowledge is a recognition of the interdependence of the different components of the ecosystem; how we are rooted in our natural environment, the system of which we are an embedded part. I studied how organic farmers in BC conceptualize, co-create and use this knowledge partly because the ties between their businesses and the ecosystem are very clear and immediate. If the soil degrades or deforestation impacts the overall system, organic farmers are often first to feel the effects. They also are ahead of the curve in terms of articulated vision and mission for how they want to interact with the ecosystem through their work.

BC: If you had to explain your results in 25 words, how would you phrase it?

SR: Businesses can engage directly and strategically with nature to protect or enhance their supply of natural capital and build greater stability of the human-nature systems in which they are embedded.

BC: What was one thing that surprised you about your research?

SR: How far past other businesses’ ideas of sustainability the organic agriculture industry had already moved. Many of the people I spoke with directly connect their worldview and business values to the idea of regeneration, of reciprocity and working within the closed loop of the ecosystem.

One farmer I interviewed said it very clearly: “I don’t believe in sustainability. Sustainability is the idea that we can keep taking at the rate that we’ve always been taking. Sustainability is over. Now, the new economy is about the regeneration economy.”

BC: Are any other industries or companies integrating ecological knowledge?

SR: Yes. In fact, my decision to study this topic for my dissertation was based on a case study of Barilla, co-authored by my dissertation supervisor Dr. Monika Winn. The pasta manufacturer reached outside of traditional organizational boundaries to understand, co-create and integrate ecological knowledge alongside the wheat growers who supplied their raw materials. The study demonstrated how the company’s efforts to help farmers transition away from monocropping to more sustainable methods had far-reaching effects within the company and community. Examples include increased production yields, reduced environmental impact and economic, social and ecological benefits for farmers, the community and the organization. Patagonia has also received attention for ecologically-aware initiatives. So it’s not just food production or small-scale farmers that can benefit from understanding their role in the ecosystem, and adjusting business practices accordingly.

BC: With regards to your PhD journey, do you have any advice for people thinking about taking that step themselves?

SR: A PhD can be a stimulating and wonderful experience; however, the journey can involve a lot of stress and many challenges as well, so it’s important to consider these ahead of time. My advice for people wanting to explore this path is to undertake thorough financial planning, carefully choose your PhD supervisor and keep sight of why you’re doing it.

I always knew that I wanted to become an academic, which undoubtedly is one of the world’s best jobs! I had the motivation to pursue the goal of making a tangible social impact, and I believe that an academic—through meaningful teaching or research—can have a visible impact on our society. The feeling that you are contributing to enhancing the boundary of human knowledge can be exciting and wonderful.

One trait that I think is essential to one’s success in a PhD is perseverance. Be prepared to endure and deal with a lot of uncertainties, rejections, frustrations and failures. But, never give up, be kind to yourself and keep on trying, and you can overcome all these.

BC: What is the headline of the article you hope we’ll be writing about your work in 10 years?

SR: Picking just one would be hard! Here are four angles I think will be interesting to explore in the future:

• Organizational change for regenerative sustainability
• Conceptualizing a regenerative sustainability-based business model
• Measuring the impact of regenerative sustainability
• Strategy for regenerative sustainability

Rahman’s research was supported by the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Dr. Ian Stuart Memorial PhD Award.
From BCom to police constable, Jessica Craig walks her own beat

by Natalie Bruckner

Being made redundant is great! Wait, what? It’s true. Just ask Jessica Craig (née Houghton), BCom ’07. Had she not been laid off from her job as a sales and account executive, says Craig, she may have floated from one job to the next, never finding the time to actually figure out what she really wanted to do as a career.

Today, Craig is a police constable at the Central Saanich Police Service, and loving every minute of it. “I never know what my day will bring. One minute I will be assigned to patrol and answer calls for service, the next I am working on a complex investigation,” she says.

Craig could not have anticipated that she would end up working for the police service. When she entered the BCom program, she had no idea what she wanted to do after her degree. “I ended up in BCom by default,” laughs Craig. “It was pretty much assumed in my family that you would go to university, and so that’s the route I took. I initially studied psychology and soon realized that it would take me many years and multiple degrees to do what I wanted to do. I looked around and knew I wanted to get a practical degree that would help me find a job at the end of it.”

After leaving university, Craig found herself in the internet marketing space. She landed a role as a business development manager for Neverblue Media Inc. before joining Yellow Pages Group as an outside sales rep, where she was extremely successful. Two years later she re-entered the internet marketing space. “It was a good career, but I never seemed to settle. I just didn’t find it fulfilling and now, looking back, I think I was always looking for something,” she says.

Craig took a friend’s advice and went to see a career coach. It was a lightbulb moment. She realized she loved working with people and wanted to make a difference. So she applied to join the police service.

“Getting in isn’t easy. It can take between two and four years to get in. There are lots of interviews, psychological testing and physical exams. I became a reserve constable with the Central Saanich Police Service which gave me policing experience and solidified that, yes, this was a good fit for me,” explains Craig.

While the transition from BCom to account executive to police constable may seem a little unorthodox, the experiences have helped her shine in her role today. “About 98 per cent of my job is dealing with people.”

While the police service continues to evolve, so too do the roles. There’s never a dull moment. Craig says that policing has become more complex as laws and case law changes, so you have to be able to adapt, and then there are the mountains of paperwork involved.

“It can be hard to understand the complexity of the job, that’s for sure. Working in a coastal community also brings its unique challenges of limited resources. Sometimes people think a police officer is there to write tickets and make everyone miserable, but honestly, we are just people too,” says Craig.

Wearing a uniform can evoke a certain reaction from society, but Craig doesn’t take it personally. For her, the moments that make it all worth it are when people come up to her in the street and thank her for that one time she made a positive impact on their lives. “I love what I do, and at the end of the day when I go home to my husband and our cats, or head up to the lake, I am just thankful I found something that makes me excited to wake up in the morning.”
Transforming Disruption

Airbus’s Daniel McCombe says transformation should prioritize building over breaking

by Stacey McLachlan

YOU COULD CALL DANIEL MCCOMBE, BCOM ’10, MGB ’11, A DISRUPTOR. It’s the preferred nomenclature in tech circles for one who’s shaking things up in their industry, and he’s certainly done plenty of that. But the Gustavson grad prefers a different term: transformation leader.

His current title is Head of Finance—Strategy and Transformation for Airbus Americas, and “transformation” is a word he takes to heart. “Disruption usually brings benefits with significant costs,” says McCombe. “Transformation, on the other hand, is about anticipation or seeing around corners. Effective transformation is planned change.”

“Their focus is on keeping the ship sailing, while I’m saying, ‘instead of a sailboat, we may need a speedboat.’ ”

McCombe believes that positive, productive transformation is about making step-change improvements without destabilizing those essential components that still need to run smoothly for the health of the business. It’s not that there aren’t costs or negative outcomes—you can’t make an omelette without breaking a few eggs, as they say—but a transformational mindset is about anticipating what those outcomes will be before they happen, and mitigating their impact.

After graduating with his Master of Global Business, McCombe parlayed entry-level analyst jobs into a role as Asia and Pacific Controller for Airbus in India. Eight years later, he stepped up as Airbus’ Financial Transformer before the company realized this role could make an even bigger impact at a leadership level, and created the position he currently holds.

He’s not the only “transformation officer” in the world, to be sure—but McCombe sees his work as being a more positive interpretation of a title that often accompanies layoffs and rightsizing. “You’ll see it as an elevated executive title—Chief Transformation Officer—but often it’s a glibly word to put on someone who’s tasked to help right the ship during turbulent times for a company that is struggling to keep up with its competitors and stay relevant in the market.”

As a company lays off 2,000 people, you’ll probably also see a “Transformation Officer,” he says. But at Airbus, McCombe isn’t cleaning house: he’s optimizing. His peers are the heads of treasury, accounting, tax and planning and reporting—the operational dream team. “My job is actually to help them perform better,” McCombe says. “Their focus is on keeping the ship sailing, while I’m saying, ‘instead of a sailboat, we may need a speedboat.’ ”

Having the responsibility of transforming a company may sound daunting, but the entrepreneurial slant of the job fits McCombe to a tee (he specialized in entrepreneurship during his BCom). “Like any innovation-focused role, transformational leaders need to accept that it’s okay to fail,” says McCombe. “My job doesn’t mean I’m always innovative and thoughtful…just that I’m stubborn,” he laughs. “I don’t want to break things for the sake of it, but I do want to leave a mark.”

In practice, this means approaching the challenge from both a macro and micro perspective. McCombe is benchmarking, looking at other companies in the field who are excelling and evaluating where Airbus stands, whether it needs to keep up and why. On the micro level, he’s looking to the future and helping individuals to be ready for whatever comes next—like adapting accountants’ roles from crunching numbers to managing technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics and machine learning. “We are training people to master the tools that are disrupting their jobs so that instead of being displaced by the massive wave of automation that is coming, they can leverage that threat and turn it into an opportunity to make themselves more indispensable to the organization,” says McCombe.

Most employees will spend 80 per cent of their time on recurring activities, and 20 per cent trying to rethink and improve the way they currently do things. For McCombe, that ratio is reversed. “I find myself trying to ask the strategic questions,” he says. “Most of my time is spent thinking about how to do things in dramatically different ways.” That being said, McCombe is quick to point out that radical change needs to happen with respect to the legacy that came before it. “It’s critical to appreciate the work that’s been done currently, and not pooh-poohing the way things are currently done, because most of the things we do are the way they are because of valid reasons,” he says. “To help the team change the way they work starts with how the current way of working has value. You shouldn’t do things differently just to say you did.”

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Enhancing customer experience in uncertain times

by Natalie Bruckner

A DAPT OR DIE. That’s a saying often heard in the insurance world when it comes to attracting and retaining customers in this rapidly changing world.

This sentiment may seem extreme, but in an industry that has to contend with the advent of autonomous cars changing the role of roadside assistance, more extreme weather events impacting our homes and the recent pandemic placing additional strain on travel insurance providers, it begins to make sense. These are just some of the challenges that John Mullane, BCom ’04, faces on a daily basis in his role as vice president of digital and customer experience transformation at BCAA. And yet, you won’t see him panicking.

“Insurance is seeing a lot of disruption both in the way of digital aggregators and new ways to manage insurance, like Lemonade and Trov, who provide on-demand insurance. A subset of the new generation really only cares about their bike, laptop and skis, and insurance needs to respond accordingly. BCAA has a long-term strategy that looks to 2030 and my role is to ensure we are a major player digitally. We are not trying to be Amazon or Google, but we certainly want to look at how they deliver and evaluate that in the context of the BCAA digital-first environment. We need to be sure we remain relevant for BC and we have lofty goals in how we can do that,” he says.

While the specifics are still very much under wraps, Mullane adds that appealing to Millennials, who now represent the largest group of consumers, is essential as they are setting the expectations moving forward. “We need to not fail in the trap that all they expect is digital. Sometimes the best customer experience is in person. Yes, we need to build a digital customer relationship, but we also have to focus on how that applies to our brick-and-mortar stores.”

Coming from an operations background means Mullane understands how to remain relevant in the lives of customers and that being flexible is essential. He credits his BCom in entrepreneurship for this: “It got me excited about taking on challenges and being part of the decision-making process,” he says. “I thought I would end up wishing to follow his path to do some failures as well—but the core philosophy of transformation remains the same. The most important thing is to walk in your customers’ shoes and experience interactions in the context they experience them—getting close to your customers will help you understand what consumer behaviours have changed (or not) as a result of the pandemic.”

Mullane worked in high-end hotels after completing his BCom, which he says instilled in him an understanding of dealing with customers, and insight into their journey. He advises anyone wishing to follow his path to do the same. “Talk to your members, your customers. You learn about the underlying causes of what they are saying, and how you can address the real concern and not just the symptoms.”

With a pandemic and its associated economic uncertainty underway, Mullane knows his industry will experience big shifts. The ideas of adaptability and customer-focused thinking will surely be vitally important in the coming months. Mullane acknowledges there will be big decisions to be made and no doubt some failures as well—but the core philosophy of transformation remains the same. “Adaptation and entrepreneurship aren’t the only traits that Mullane cites as essential to his role. Stepping into the customer-first mindset comes naturally to someone with experience on the front lines of customer support. Mullane says. “I thought I would end up taking a more broad role, but my current role requires me to challenge the status quo and think about things differently, and have that entrepreneurial mindset.”

For Mullane, this approach has helped during his role’s evolution from director of customer experience to support centre of everything we do. So instead of just providing home insurance, for example, we are now considering providing additional tools and resources like a homebuyers checklist guide. It transforms the thinking by considering the journey our customers take more broadly,” he says.

Mullane acknowledges there will be big decisions to be made and no doubt some failures as well—but the core philosophy of transformation remains the same. The most important thing is to walk in your customers’ shoes and experience interactions in the context they experience them—getting close to your customers will help you understand what consumer behaviours have changed (or not) as a result of the pandemic. If you can do that, then customer experience initiatives will be highly valuable as they can position you to innovate and grow as we begin to restart our economy.”
Picture a sunny, breezy morning in spring: flowering boughs of arbutus wave from a craggy outcrop as a group of children clamber along a path below, chattering as they settle down by a stream and turn to fresh pages of their sketch pads. Quiet gradually falls as an instructor demonstrates the technique they are practicing that day and many pencils start to move—tentatively, at first—across paper. As the minutes tick by, confidence and curiosity slowly unfurls. The drawing is interspersed with questions: How many flowers does a tree have? Did anyone else see the squirrel? How do you draw wind? This is Nature Sketch in action.

Leanne Cadden, BCom ‘05, approached the Batemen Foundation in 2016 and proposed the idea for a program that connects kids with art and nature. A mother herself, she had looked in vain for such a program for her daughter.

“I believe that nature is one of the greatest transformative powers on the planet, and art is the expression of this transformation,” says Cadden. “Nature Sketch combines these two forces and offers kids a place to freely explore who they are in shared habitats and ecosystems that we as humans are interconnected with.”

For Cadden, the seed of the idea was planted when her great-grandmother put a pencil in her hand at the age of three. Art gave her a medium to express her love of animals and nature, while also learning about herself and her creativity. That was the kind of opportunity she wanted all kids, including her daughter, to have.

It was a close fit for the Bateman Foundation, whose mission is to engage people with the beauty and importance of nature. Peter Ord, BA ’87, the foundation’s executive director, says that demand for the program has increased exponentially. Since Nature Sketch’s first group of young artists forayed into the woods with their sketchbooks in 2016, more than 1,000 young people have taken part. Reaching beyond Victoria, it is offered in five locations throughout Canada, and is poised to expand.

“Alongside general increase in interest, our Nature Sketch partnerships with hospitals and health groups in particular have seen a major growth,” says Ord. “There is a real value for many who suffer from anxiety or depression in spending time in nature. Our partners in the healthcare sector see real benefit from the mindfulness that comes with contemplating nature through art.”

Cadden, who has led many sessions of Nature Sketch herself over the years, has seen firsthand how students respond.

“The power of nature has a way of transforming young people’s daily struggles—whether they are feeling sad about a family situation, coping with trauma or dealing with a health problem,” she says. “Even if they don’t quite know how to express what they are going through, nature allows them to deal with it in an environment surrounded by other species.”

In 2019, Cadden accepted a role as Artist-in-Residence for the non-profit National Environment Treasure, and is hard at work illustrating their 24-point Canadian biodiversity action agenda authored by Women For Nature – Nature Canada.

“Nature Sketch holds such a special place in my heart,” says Cadden. “It helped me discover my true passion: the natural world.” This passion has translated to thousands of people, young and old, discovering the transformative power of a pencil and the outdoors.
Exceptional ELEMANS
Remembering a leader, mentor and friend

by Krista Boehnert

For those who had the honour of having Pat Elemans do a formal introduction of them, or for any audience member who has heard her deliver these remarks, you know the great care, detail, warmth and humour she brought to any emcee engagement. Oftentimes her remarks were memorable—sometimes more so—than those of the person she was introducing. She was just that good at it, leaving us with the daunting task of paying tribute to someone who could paint a picture of someone’s life in technicolour, using the perfect words and descriptions. While this is an impossible undertaking—we’re no Elemans, after all—we want to celebrate and honour our dear colleague, leader and friend whom we lost far too soon, in March of this year.

Dedicating her energy, warmth and vision to the school for 15 years, Elemans was an inspiration to many people in our community, both on campus and off. From revitalizing our MBA during her tenure as program director to leading the school’s alumni, development, communications and marketing efforts as assistant dean, external relations, she was central to the school’s impact on community, students and staff. She brought her signature style, presence and grace everywhere she went, from the front of the classroom to the emcee’s mic at the school’s flagship Distinguished Entrepreneur of the Year Award gala.

Elemans was a firm believer in giving back and encouraging others to do so as well. As Gustavson’s key community contact during her tenure, she was well known by both locals and international contacts. The relationships she forged built strong connections with Gustavson in the form of business representatives for the school’s International Advisory Board and recruiting executives-in-residence, adjunct professors, guest speakers and executive mentors to engage with our students. Driven by a passion to enhance the student experience, Elemans loved to connect community members with the next generation of business leaders.

When enhancing the student experience required financial support, Elemans more than rose to the challenge, securing transformational gifts from Peter B. Gustavson and Sardul S. Gill to name the business school and graduate school, respectively. She was also instrumental in securing funding for the Centre for Social and Sustainable Innovation, the BMO Aboriginal Canadian Entrepreneurship Catalyst Fund, the Jarislowsky CAPI East Asia (Japan) Chair and the Black Press Scholarship program as well as numerous other scholarships and award funds.

Elemans’s impact will live on in the relationships she forged, the initiatives she championed and the hearts she touched. In one of her final speaking engagements for the school, Elemans introduced the speaker using a list of adjectives that she felt best described the guest. And she was on to something. As we honour her, words feel inadequate, but they offer comfort too. Here’s to you, Exceptional Elemans. Leader. Positive. Mentor. Passionate. Advocate. Energetic. Supporter. Funny. Warm. Unforgettable. Friend.

In consultation with her family, the school has established a memorial fund to support Elemans’s legacy of encouraging and building the foundations for student success and the pursuit of excellence in community-engaged learning. For those wishing to make a gift in her honour, please visit extrweb.uvic.ca/Pat-Elemans
While Hartsook may not be actively flexing his financial management skills as he tends to patients in his first year of medical residency, the fact that his dual degrees make him stand out from the crowd—and might even give him an advantage in his new career as a medical doctor.

Hartsook’s career change wasn’t totally surprising, looking back. In high school, he enjoyed all his science classes. But as a social 18-year-old, entering the healthcare field had felt like too much of a commitment; he was hungry to get on a path with marketable skills and get life started. So he jumped into the world of business school and co-ops instead. After seven years on a finance track, however, Hartsook started to feel stuck. “I didn’t feel happy or energetic to be going to work on a daily basis,” he says. On a bigger level, he simply didn’t see a fulfilling, overarching purpose in the job anymore.

There was no big “aha” moment that inspired him to do a career pivot: just a nagging feeling as time went by that something was missing. “Introspection and self-evaluation were really important pieces in trying to determine what to do and where to go,” he says. “Being fulfilled and having a sense of purpose are high on my list of priorities in a career, and medicine checked those boxes.”

So he said goodbye to the steady paycheques and seniority at the bank, and went back to square one. “Telling people you’re taking your career 180 degrees can come off as sounding pretty crazy, but as cheesy as it is, you’ve got to follow your gut and heart,” he says.

Fears and doubts were racing through the 29-year-old’s mind as he stepped into the classroom again. “It obviously brought up a lot of self-doubt,” smiles Hartsook. “I was 10 years older than everyone, and the anxiety was bubbling up.” Was he too old for this? Would he be able to develop connections with his classmates? How did studying work again?

But medicine wasn’t as different from commerce as Hartsook had initially thought. According to guidelines from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, the ideal doctor is expected to be a communicator, a leader, a collaborator, a scholar and a professional (as well as an expert in human biology, of course). “Most people really only think of the ‘medical expert’ facet, but that part is actually easier to learn than soft skills that might not come as naturally,” says Hartsook. “It was the four years I spent doing the commerce degree that really stretched my ability to collaborate with people from different backgrounds and improved my communication and public speaking skills—it makes me think a commerce background is probably even better than science.”

With that first degree, Hartsook had developed a soft skill set that turned out to be highly desirable in the medical field.

Today, he’s in his first of five residency years, specializing in psychiatric care, and he’s loving every minute of it. “It was absolutely, definitely the right decision, despite how scary it was to make it,” he says. “Ultimately you could be stuck in a job for 30 years. Is this how you want to spend it?” Some might see a career change like this one as a transformation—but for Hartsook, the journey from commerce to medicine has been an evolution. ■
But as the semester started to wind down, and the time came to book a flight back to Canada, I couldn’t bring myself to do it. I was hooked; I didn’t want my adventure to end. Thankfully, the next plane ride that would change my life was about to occur.

On a flight back to Austria from a weekend trip to London, I was seated beside a chatty businessman. The two-hour plane ride quickly became a job interview, and a few weeks later, after my semester finished, I received an offer for an internship in London, England. At the time it felt like I had peaked: a 20-something-year-old from Victoria, BC living and working in London, England. I had officially made it.

Shortly after graduating with my BCom, I found myself packing up everything I owned for the third time and staring out the window of a plane, this time headed to Taipei, Taiwan. I had never been to Asia before, so it came as a shock to many—including myself—that I was moving there. I was fascinated by Asia in the international business classes of my degree, and knew that learning Chinese and understanding the markets would give me a competitive edge in my career.

But in spite of the seemingly surprise move, I knew my earlier exchange and co-op experiences had equipped me with the cross-cultural competencies that I needed to thrive. Today, I am delighted to say I have been living Taipei and working in the marketing department at a tech company for the last two years.

My life here in Taiwan is vastly different than it was in Victoria, Austria or London. Most days, before heading to work, I grab a pan-fried pork dumpling from outside my apartment. Depending on the weather—Taipei is either 40 degrees and humid or chucking down rain during typhoon season—I set off on a 30-minute bike ride across the city to my office.

On my morning ride, I turn my head to watch Taiwanese retirees practicing tai chi in the park, and turn my eyes away from the butcher chopping pork at his roadside stand. The view from my office on the 25th floor is stunning. From this angle, the super-skyscraper Taipei 101 rises above the city, framed by distant mountains, making Taipei feel like both concrete jungle and part of nature at the same time.

My company—a local software company with an assortment of subsidiaries—boasts a mixture of local and foreign talent, and I have colleagues from all over the world. The skills I learned in marketing classes have helped me in my role as a marketing specialist. And my entrepreneurial and international acumen allowed me to lead the launch of one of our products into the Canadian market.

After work, I dedicate a few of my evenings to studying Chinese. The rest I spend dining at restaurants serving ridiculously delicious and cheap food from around the world. Eating out is essential as my apartment has no kitchen; I haven’t cooked a meal in over two years.

I’ve also been lucky enough to explore Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam and all over Taiwan during national holidays and vacation time.

Although this adventure has been as incredible as it sounds, it wasn’t easy to start my professional career somewhere so vastly different from home. I am one of approximately 180,000 foreigners living in Taipei—a city of nearly 7 million. Of those foreigners, I am one of only 206 females from Canada. Since most foreigners here are working as English teachers, it’s rare for me to run into other foreign female professionals—let alone in my age group.

It was a bold decision to start my career in Asia—one which I wouldn’t have dreamed of without the outside-of-the-box education I received at Gustavson.

In a time when much of the world is closing borders, Gustavson taught me to embrace different cultures, and strive to be a global citizen. ■

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*Photo: Courtesy of Mollie Moric*
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