

18-05-2020



Hi Pride,

So here we are day 53 of lockdown. A lockdown that should never have extended past the initial 21 days. But extend it did and, now, we are going to have to deal with the economic cost and direct human cost as a result of this for a long time.

But there is a light. It looks like we will proceed to level 3 on 1 June. We should be there already, but at least it is a step in the right direction. There is also still much that is not allowed in level 3 that needs to be added to the list for the survival of the economy.

We should be moving on swiftly and focusing on what is needed to do this. The government summary of level 1 accurately describes what we should now be doing now: "Most normal activity can resume, with precautions and health guidelines followed at all times."

Don't get me wrong, we cannot take the virus lightly. As a responsible society we must take all the necessary precautions to limit the spread of infection. All business has to play its part and adopt the safety protocols that we have all come to understand. We've had 53 days for it to sink in. Any business worth its salt understands this - it must make its customers comfortable that they are safe. A delayed opening with politicians deciding which business should open, with arbitrary trading hours and product restrictions is bizarre. NCC, thanks, but we can take it from here.

Once again, sadly our politicians may be looking to overreach on their mandate. Are they really going to restrict trade of alcohol to 12 hours a week as per the current proposals? This does not pass the test of rationality. Create huge queues in restricted periods after stifling supply for an eternity?

Is there some good news in all of this? Yes, I think so. While SA is still building towards the peak of infection and this will have serious consequences, much of the rest of the World has started to move on. Germany and much of Europe is opening up. The UK, in its befuddled way, is doing the same. And we are learning that mankind will survive. It's not great and we have to adapt, but adapt we will. The result of this is that there will be a roadmap out there for us to study and learn from as we go through the worst of our crisis.

What is my hope for this next period? In studying the Swedish model a sentiment expressed by the Swedes struck a chord. To paraphrase, they said, "The government trusts its people, so the people trust the government. If they ask us to do something, we do it." Yes, let's build a culture of trust in South Africa. In our company culture we have a simple phrase that means so much to me: "Care why." In order to care why, one has to know what to do, how to do it and why to do it, but the magic happens when you care about the why. It is an understanding that the rules and procedures are there to create a specific result. They are a great guideline, and very important, but sometimes have to be modified to achieve the "why", the desired result. My hope is for our leaders to care why decisions are being made and not get caught up in over-regulation.

And, finally, in a weird way, travel is like alcohol. Restrict the ability of people to partake in it and it will only want them to do it even more. Travel and adventure is in our blood as humans. For many it's a large part of what they work for. So Pride, when the gates open, people will want to experience our great country and our unique portfolio. We'll be here with a huge smile (maybe covered with cloth initially) and a determination to make them feel safe, cared for and valued.

All the best
Kevin