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It will come as a surprise to no one that the managing director and I have been indulging in a bit of travel lately. It's all tax-deductible research of course, culminating in our annual senior broker conference in Wanaka NZ. Joined by Cameron and Paul and their respective MD's, we were appalled to discover that our conference had been booked in a place of great natural beauty, accompanied by lovely dining options and nearby ski fields! On the 15th anniversary of MPF serious matters needed to be discussed so we would have preferred a more subdued and reserved venue like, say..... Adelaide.

No disrespect to beautiful Adelaide of course. I hear the annual serial killer's symposium is very well supported albeit attendee numbers seem to reduce over the course of the 3-day event.

Incidentally, I heard of a guy driving to Adelaide who picked up a hitchhiker. The hiker remarked that the driver wasn't worried that he might have picked up a serial killer. The driver retorted that he was fairly relaxed as the odds of two serial killers being in the one car were remote.

But I digress. Back to anniversaries and travel.

Don't you find the safety briefing on airlines weird? There seems to be an assumption that as the giant aluminium cylinder plummets flaming from the sky, all on board will remain calm. The oxygen mask section of the pre-take-off briefing is a particular favourite. In case of emergency, masks will fall from the ceiling. Place the mask over your face and breath normally. Breath normally!!! Like hell. I'm going to be screaming and hyperventilating in equal measure. Then, when we hit the water, we're supposed to inflate our life jackets and blow a whistle. I'm not sure if you've ever tried to blow up a burning balloon while hyperventilating and decompressing, but I can't imagine it's easy.

Why not save all this nonsense and reduce the briefing to a description of the brace position. Ladies and gentlemen, in the event of an emergency kindly bend forward, place your head between your knees and kiss your ass goodbye.

I find travel brings out all sorts of interesting behaviour in people. As I have documented before, Paul is terrified of flying. I have such sympathy for his condition that I've stopped playing flight recorded last words black box audio loudly on my iPhone while sitting next to him. On the other hand, it is becoming apparent that the MD is perfectly happy on an aircraft but she's afraid of airports. Unlike fear of flying, fear of airports seems to be a largely undocumented and under researched condition, manifesting itself mostly by a need to visit many many washrooms. Miraculously the condition, somewhat like fear of flying, appears to abate entirely when quantities of alcohol are introduced.

I've got a couple of fears when travelling. A slight fear of landing coz I love flying, and a very real fear of rental car companies, coz they can be terrible. Some have a business model that defies logic. No matter what you order you'll get what you're given. At our Wanaka conference we decided to embrace this model in the finance broker space. It will make our lives so easy. Lots of options on our website but bugger all actually available. What could possibly go wrong?

Seriously though... we have been reflecting on what it means to hit 15 years in a small business started from scratch as a one-man band. I suspect like many businesses we couldn't have planned our journey, and if we had it's highly unlikely things would have followed that path.

There have been pivotal moments and challenges, some downright inspiring and some terrifying. I'd rate pinching Paul and Cam from Suncorp as watershed moments for the business. Deciding as founder not to keep any new deals to myself took a bit of courage (I don't share well), but it's been a decision vindicated by the growth of the business and the engagement of the brokers.

Building a team of non-bankers from diverse backgrounds and age groups has been wonderful for the business and has allowed us to grow while maintaining a really positive culture.

We were on a roll by 2017 when the banking Royal Commission nearly derailed the broker profession completely. To our horror some banks that had professed a love of brokers turned up at the Commission and gave evidence to the contrary. One, in particular, shall forever be remembered for suggesting borrowers and not banks should pay brokers. Had the Commission mandated the end of bank paid commissions, the broker industry would have been decimated and borrowers left to the tender mercies of the lenders. As advocates for borrowers we take our role very seriously and any attempt by banks to sideline us is a terrible look. Poor optics as they say. In any event the broker profession survived and has thrived ever since... except for a small speed bump!

Post Royal Commission we continued to grow and were enjoying tremendous industry support. We were in clean air and flying smooth when, in 2019, along came Covid. Our pipeline of deals dried up overnight and many of our clients struggled. Our various state and federal politicians had a shocker and totally overreacted, but the banks stepped up. Repayment moratoriums and business support packages were offered, and I think it's fair to say the banks saved the day for many small businesses. They also continued to honour our Commission arrangements which allowed us to keep the doors open. It was a close call and a salient lesson in having reserves for a rainy day, even if there's not a cloud in the sky.

As we predicted the money printing undertaken to fund Covid support has led to inflation and higher interest rates. It could scarcely be otherwise, albeit I am astounded that our current federal treasurer appears to have no grasp of basic supply side economics, and the risks of not linking monetary supply to productivity.

And now we find ourselves 15 years down the track, a brilliant team of 7 + one troublesome founder, a client base of thousands and many millions under management. Where to from here? I'm not sure but I know one thing, we will be sticking to our knitting and remaining proudly analogue in a digital world.

In closing a shout out to the managing director. She gets a mention in most of these articles and when she doesn't, I am usually inundated with requests to explain and confirm her good health and whereabouts. Without the MD I would never have had the courage to leave the bank and have a crack. She's been my strongest supporter, has built a wonderful rapport with our team and inspires me every day. Happy anniversary baby.

Ok, maybe inspires, maybe terrifies... you get my drift.

Disclaimer: The remarks about South Australia and Adelaide are jokes. In these troubled times of presumed offence, we seem to have lost our collective sense of humour. I'm on a mission to balance the ledger. For the record I'm going to Adelaide in January for the Tour Down Under, without doubt the best professional bike race and associated festival this side of the Tour De France. If cycling is not your thing, I suggest Hahndorf in the Adelaide Hills and a Jacobs Creek Johann Shiraz Cabernet.

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