

# Introduction

## 2020: A study in chaos

When we wrote this book in 2020, it seemed the world had been turned upside down. The COVID-19 pandemic had taken many lives, precipitated a worldwide lockdown, and sent many countries' economies into a tailspin.

On the West Coast of the United States, brush and forest fires destroyed more than 8 million acres in 12 states (Nijhuis, 2020). There were more tropical storms in the Atlantic than in any previous recorded year, with Hurricane Laura alone causing 77 deaths and \$14.1 billion in damage (Aon, 2020). The monsoon season in Asia was one of the deadliest on record, with massive flooding killing thousands and displacing millions (Center for Disaster Philanthropy, 2020).

Some 33 armed conflicts raged around the world, with many of them ongoing for years (Comolli, 2020). There were humanitarian crises in Venezuela, Yemen and Rohingya, as well as on the southern border of the US. The year 2020 also saw an earthquake in Puerto Rico, wildfires in the Amazon basin, extensive bushfires across Australia, Cyclone Fani in India, Tropical Cyclone Idai in Southern Africa, famine in northeastern Africa and extensive civil unrest in the United States.

Often it felt like our world was a snow globe that someone kept shaking. But amid all these tragic disasters, there were some points of light. In a strange way, the COVID-19 pandemic brought people together, as we all were in the same mess. Anxiety went way up, but people were forced to slow down and focus on what matters: the ones we love.

Many businesses also proved to be a point of light. Unfortunately, some couldn't survive the shutdown. But others did, innovating new ways of interacting safely with customers. They proved their mettle, persisting and succeeding against the challenges.

No doubt you were impacted by COVID-19. You may recall when you first had to send people home to work, or were sent home yourself. For most, working from home was new, and it wasn't an option.

## Sharing what we know

We had been toying with the idea of writing a book about taking a company remote, and 2020 brought new urgency to the project. Together we have 30 years of combined experience running remote companies, and we felt compelled to share what we have learned.

Crises are tipping points (we'll explore that more in the chapters that follow), and those who are bold and quick can seize the opportunities that lie behind the challenges. Speed is your friend when navigating obstacles, but it also increases risk. We hope our ideas will help you avoid some skinned knees.

We are sure that a lot of people have a lot of questions, so we're going to throw just about everything we know at you. The information is valuable whether your company is still working remotely, or considering a hybrid model combining office and home hours.

### *A little help from our friends*

Some amazing people have shared some remarkable stories in the book, and we are deeply grateful. You'll hear from a human resources leader who helped staff up nurses in the heat of COVID-19. A CEO will talk about completing a merger involving thousands of employees while also setting everyone up for success at home. Another HR leader will share insights her global company has learned from being a remote organization for over 10 years. A Director of Programs will tell how she led non-profit programs from being completely in-person to being completely online. You'll hear from a Marine Corps general about the importance of training and culture in creating a culture like no other.

### *Pay it forward*

We've known one another and have been swapping stories and ideas for over a decade. Even if your company has been remote for a while, we think there will be some new ideas. You'll definitely find some engaging stories, one-of-a-kind aphorisms and epigrams, and ideas ranging from commonsensical to crazy.

As you read the book, we encourage you to use sticky notes to mark the things that resonate for you and your company. Once you have finished reading, you can go back to your bookmarks and apply what you have learned. Of course, we fully expect you to take the ideas from the book and tailor them to your situation. You may even come up with some entirely new ideas.

Did you see the 2000 film, *Pay It Forward*? It's a feel-good story about a middle-schooler's effort to change the world by forming an ongoing chain made of acts of kindness. We love the idea, and because we have enjoyed success, this book gives us a chance to pay it forward. We're asking you, too, to pay it forward by sharing your ideas and responses in a community we've created on Slack: Remote Work Movement. Sign up at <https://chrisdyer.com/remotework>. Together we can maintain the momentum and continue to learn and share.

## References

- Aon (2020) Global Catastrophe Recap, September 2020, [http://thoughtleadership.aonbenfield.com/Documents/20200810\\_analytics-if-september-global-recap.pdf](http://thoughtleadership.aonbenfield.com/Documents/20200810_analytics-if-september-global-recap.pdf) (archived at <https://perma.cc/MD7E-ZLN4>)
- Center for Disaster Philanthropy (2020) 2020 Monsoon Floods, *Disaster Philanthropy*, 17 December, <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/disaster/2020-monsoon-floods> (archived at <https://perma.cc/D8GL-5GAN>)
- Comolli, V (2020) Armed Conflict Survey, Editor's Introduction, *IISS*, 27 May, [www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/05/acs-2020-introduction](http://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2020/05/acs-2020-introduction) (archived at <https://perma.cc/7ZVX-L9MJ>)
- Nijhuis, M (2020) The West Coast wildfires are apocalypse, again, *New Yorker*, 20 October, [www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-a-warming-planet/the-west-coast-wildfires-are-apocalypse-again](http://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-a-warming-planet/the-west-coast-wildfires-are-apocalypse-again) (archived at <https://perma.cc/JK7A-AGWT>)