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# Focusing on fundamentals

As the world seemingly turns upside-down, AdvanceTrack has spoken to experts about how you can maintain client services and manage your people

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# People, processes... profits?

Some the most popular and well-known advisers and experts have been speaking to AdvanceTrack and accountants about how to lead through the crisis, while reconfiguring your services – and people – in a locked-down world



While physical conferences and get-togethers are currently off limits, that hasn't stopped AdvanceTrack from running a 'mini conference' online via Zoom.

On 28 April, we ran 'Beyond the Pandemic – The Customers' Journey', a 90-minute online seminar, in which experts provided insight about how best to structure your approach to support clients through the crisis, and beyond.

## **Innovate and communicate**

Kicking off the session was AdvanceTrack MD Vipul Sheth. He said that accountants are in a unique position to provide real value to the people they work for – above and beyond a basic and narrow 'service'.

But they must not rest on their laurels. "The wow of today is the normal of tomorrow," said Sheth.

Citing the exponential improvements in Amazon's service provision and constant innovation, he explained that day-to-day consumer experiences influence what people expect from professional services organisations – and they must step up.

"Don't compare yourself with what other accountants do – consumers and clients are driven by other experiences they have – that represents



their expectation,” he said. “So why do you do what you do? You have to deliver value.”

While the coronavirus crisis has proved incredibly disruptive, it has forced accountants and clients to communicate more – albeit via digital online platforms.

“The importance of relationships never goes away,” said Sheth. “And now we see our people increasingly moving up the value chain – with clients and in our business. If you weren’t using Zoom or Teams a month ago, you are now – and these tools are helping you have conversations.”

You might have had two or three client meetings in a day; now you can have ten or 15 – hopefully all incredibly valuable to you and clients, explained Sheth: “Being digital allows you to do that. You’re doing things a lot quicker, communicating more – so take the digital journey.”

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### Invest in relationships

Karen Reyburn, founder of The Profitable Firm, gave an inspirational talk focusing on the relationship-building you will inevitably be doing at the moment. And that, while billing and charging is a difficult and thorny task at the moment, you are investing in potentially keeping clients for a lifetime.



“Some things have changed in the crisis, some things haven’t,” she said. “Relationships... it’s always important to invest in client relationships.”

Putting yourself ‘out there’ will also engender positive sentiment towards you and your firm from potential clients and other working partners.

“So many of you are already spending time on the things that build relationships – sharing information, blogs, videos... just get it out there! You will get enquiries if you’re doing those things. You are on the front line of saving businesses,” Reyburn added.

Some firms are fearful of giving too much valuable information away in the public domain, via their website or on social media. However, Reyburn’s approach is very simple: “Give information away, charge for implementation.”

If people think that undertaking a task will be exhausting or difficult, they will come to you, whether you’ve given them the basic information or not, she suggested.

“The more you share, the more they’ll want to work with you,” she said. “Use content to build assets. What can I build so that when they have problems, this is the tool they use? This is why video is so powerful: you’re connecting with them faster – the number of accountants who are realising that it doesn’t have to be perfect, but doing so builds relationships faster.”

### Efficiency and trust

As founder of presentation training business Speaking Ambition, and MD of Blue Arrow Accounting, Alexandra Bond Burnett is well placed

### People / Process / Technology Framework





to talk about how you build trust with existing and potential clients.

“How do you give someone the green flag that you’re the best person to choose to help them?” asked Bond Burnett.

Breaking down the elements that are required to create trust was a key

part of bond Bond Burnett’s presentation.

The trust equation is: credibility; reliability; and intimacy.

**Credibility** – “Demonstrating your experience, be that talking about things you know and understand, having conversations with people and presenting your qualifications.”

**Reliability** – “This is about ‘showing up’. Doing what you said you were going to do. To be there so your clients don’t need to worry.”

**Intimacy** – “You can be credible and reliable, but you have to build that level of rapport. People make logical decisions but with a dollop of emotion. How do you make someone feel? Safe, challenged, that they can do anything?”

Bond Burnett pulls this together by discussing ‘self orientation’. “It is a funny phrase – but essentially we’re considering who do you think about when you’re communicating?” she said. “It’s more than likely that it’s ‘what will someone think of me?’ Don’t focus on yourself – turn it around and think about the client.

“How can they be helped right now, and then

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next week and then the week after that... then start communicating that to them. The hero is the client; make them the centre of the story.”

### Service clarity

“How do things get done?” asks Trent McLaren, global head of accounting and sales at Practice Ignition. Accountants need to be clear about understanding the work entailed both internally for your practice, and what you do for your clients.

For McLaren, this ultimately means you are looking for a balance between the work your people undertake, the technology used as a tool and the processes put in place to make the work flow.

“When the customer and employee experiences work well, then you as a practice gain a competitive advantage,” he said.

“It means you’re completing work faster, with fewer resources, improving quality and hopefully improving customer satisfaction.”

Another key task is to ‘map’ the customer journey. Do you understand the path a client

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takes, and the touchpoints they have with you, as you work together? From them becoming a lead/prospect to becoming your client and beyond, think about how you communicate with them and the services you provide.

By doing this you create a ‘blueprint’. McLaren referenced an article by the Nielsen Norman Group on this very topic, which [can be found here](#).

• *Kevin Reed is a freelance journalist and former editor of Accountancy Age.*



# The need to lead

Last month we produced a fascinating roundup of views and opinions from experts within the field of practice management, about leading an accounting firm through the current storm.

The panel, comprising Clarity's Aynsley Damery, Futrli's Hannah Dawson, Xero's Glen Foster and AdvanceTrack's Vipul Sheth, discussed both the inspiration and perspiration that will go into leading your firm into a post-Covid-19 crisis world.

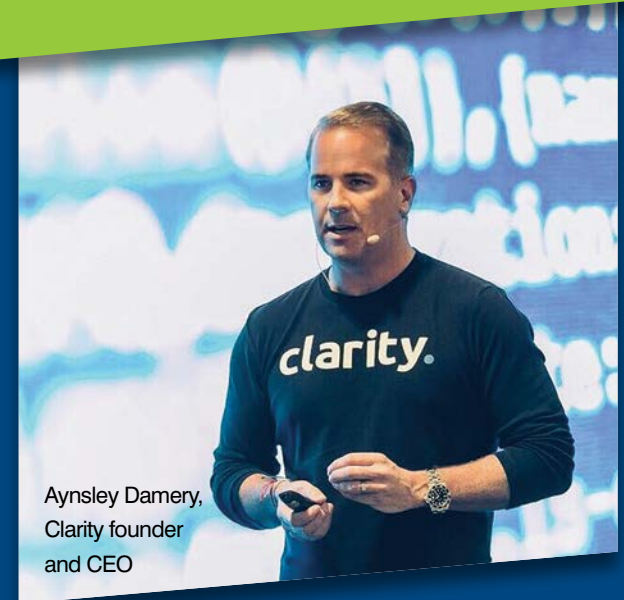
Damery, who has also run his own accounting practice, is speaking to clients en masse about firms' issues and challenges. He also shared some 'good news stories' of best practice he gleaned in recent weeks.

"Leaders are there to lead, but we need help and support and teams are there to support

as well," he said. "In small firms or as a sole practitioner, you need to have someone to talk to – to allow you to vent. You need to release the pressure. I've always had go-to people."

Dawson spoke about how investors are treating the current marketplace, mental health, working from home and leading from the front while working from home.

"Make sure you have communication channels with and between staff that are [informal], so people can chat about non-work. There's a constant Zoom link open for people to chat," he explained. "Equally we have a Slack channel where funny pictures and videos can be posted. It opens up the conversations about 'how are you doing?'. Tech doesn't need to be serious all the time – use it to be light-hearted."



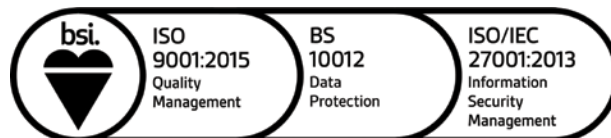
Aynsley Damery,  
Clarity founder  
and CEO

The value Foster brought to the webinar was his experience for many years as a remote worker, explaining how people work differently from home. "In this modern world, we'd hope to work from anywhere," he said. "But the tech you use can differ from your desk compared with home or on the move."

View the webinar, and others, by [clicking here](#).

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