

The year after

What I have learned from 2020



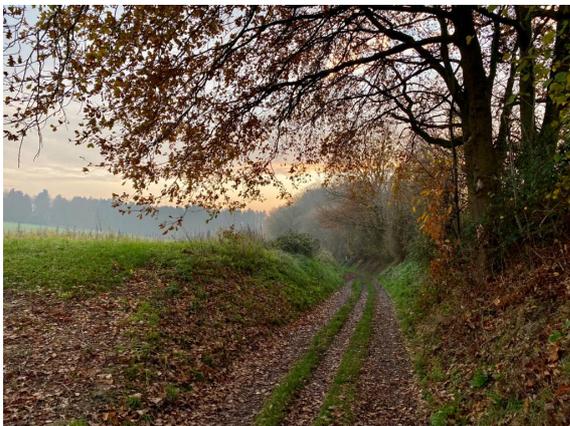
Discrepancy between the plan and the reality

At the December 2019 launch of my first book, *The Book of Noble Purpose*, I felt like I was in a kind of euphoria. I realized an important milestone by finishing the intense writing, the book was born, a diverse crowd of people came together to celebrate with me, and I was excited to announce what I had intended to be the imminent launch of the global Noble Purpose movement.

Little did I know that 2020 was going to be such a surreal and unimaginable year. A year that has totally inverted the way we have worked, created new ideas, concepts and programs, brought our teams together, interacted with our clients. Where I had foreseen to do tens of business trips, as I do more or less every year, where I was scheduled to give keynotes on the occasion of the book launch at about 15 different events in as many countries, where I had organized the GINPI project teams around an exciting series of client missions, in a couple of weeks, from mid-March to beginning of April, almost everything got canceled or postponed indefinitely.

Businesswise, it has been one of the toughest and most surreal years in my life. And yet, on a personal level, I found it an incredibly rich year of learning, adapting, showing resilience, staying serene and looking inwards in order to better feel and understand what I was going to make of it all.

I want to finish this unique year with some philosophical reflections and questions.



Union with Nature

Having spent my first childhood years in the Flemish countryside and having a botanist father who taught my brothers and myself the beauty, magic and power of nature, I have always loved being connected with Nature. But never in a business year have I spent so much time walking, wandering around and hiking in parks, forests and woods.

I often walked alone, to relax from a full day behind screens and to detox from the digital set-up, to get deeply connected with myself, while observing and using the evocative force of the botanical world.

I also walked regularly with one or two friends, business relations or clients. Walking together, going in the same direction, next to each other, is a truly magical process. The quality of the conversation is observably higher and more profound at the end of the walk than at the start.

Have you taken the time to go out and connect with nature? Have you set up the way you connect with others to shift from digital behind-the-screen contacts to walking in harmony together?

Down-consumption

Normally, I fly over 150.000 miles annually. I flew about 15.000 miles this year. I used to take high speed trains every month. This year, I was on the Thalys and the Eurostar only twice. Each year I spend on average between 150 to 200 nights in hotels, clients' residences and friends' homes while on business trips. In 2020 I've spent about 30 days out of home.

While in full lockdown I felt close to zero need to buy 'stuff' via digital channels. Not that I believe that these channels don't work – quite the contrary – but simply because these special times made clear to me that I didn't need to buy, purchase, acquire, get more (often of the same). I found it liberating that we had to stay at home and that I didn't have the urge to go out or go digital to buy whatever I believed before was 'nice or necessary' to have.

What are the things that you would have bought in a normal year, but didn't buy in 2020? What did you learn about your spending pattern? Did you miss something, really? How much of who you are depends on what you have?

It made me aware of the economic scheme in which many of us operate. We are used to buying and acquiring all kinds of services and goods. Often we don't need these things, but we find them pleasurable to possess, or, through subtle or less subtle marketing, we feel obliged to purchase them.

I believe that in 2021 and beyond, the question of why we buy things, where the things we buy come from and how sustainable what we buy is, will become – rightfully – more important. If not truly key.

Connection with god

Although I don't believe in god as a personalized figure with great uber-powers over the human race, I do consider myself a very spiritual being, relating to the world from a rather holistic angle. I feel connected with Nature, with the energy and the force of the universe, with the deeper, more subtle dimensions of what we consider Life.



Having had a regular meditation and yoga practice since many years, I have abundantly used 2020 to go even deeper, open up even more and get even broader perspectives.

While being pushed in a global lockdown, while having to deal with the confronting figures of business cancelations and decreasing enterprise turnover, while watching the news and hearing from close ones what was happening to them, while having serious doubts about how governmental decisions were taken... I could only remain calm, serene and confident by putting things in perspective, by staying connected with my inner core, by reviving my noble purpose.

I realized I was doing this through meditation, gentle reflection (not beating myself up), journaling, practicing yoga, doing sports and being in nature, reading and writing. These are my ways of being connected with 'god' and keeping calm, serene, focused and joyful in the chaos, the unpredictability and the ever-changing context and parameters.

What has been your way of connecting with your deeper self? What have been your conversations with 'god'? Which 'god' do you use as your source for inspiration, becoming complete and staying focused?

What really matters



What probably has made most sense to me in 2020 was observing how billions of people, myself included, were forced to go back to the essence and live without all the, often self-imposed, complexity.

2020 was the year of balancing between the minimum – with all so-called non-essential businesses closed, massive restrictions around traveling and going out, and most of the usual fun activities reduced to almost zero – and the maximum – with the appreciation of that what was allowed and of what truly was felt as 'this matters for me'.

The quality of love and relationships, the need for connection and friendship, the value of meaningful and empathetic conversations, the quality of work and doing purposeful things, the physical human touch, hug and kiss, the liberty of being able to decide when one does what, all got so much more meaning and felt truly essential in my pyramid of priorities.

Which essentials did 2020 spotlight for you? Which major shift did you experience in your pyramid of priorities? Anything that surprised you there?

The apocalypse of the old

As I strongly believe that we can only live a full life when we live consciously in the present, while honoring the past and creating positive intentions for the future, I am aware that 2020 has in some sorts created an apocalypse around many things that were considered normal, necessary and/or acceptable until the pandemic exploded.

Although I am very grateful for what 2020 taught me, despite all the drama and the complexity and the never-ending drive to reinvent myself and my businesses, I am looking forward to what we will be able to achieve in 2021, and which impact I'll have around me.

I consider 2021 as the real kick-off of the decennium of human transformation. We won't have any excuse to leave unresolved matters for what they are. We won't have any reason not to tackle what is obsolete, what is up for renewal and what no longer matters.

If I have one hope for the human race for 2021, then it is clearly to start the year with more consciousness, awareness, self-confidence and collective responsibility. As the pandemic year of 2020 brought to the slaughterhouse lots of systemic, economic, societal and governance inconsistency, irrelevance and unacceptability, I believe that 2021 will be the segue year to a more elevated decade. And I am committed to contribute to that!

What about you? Wanna stick with the old or wanna go for the new?