

# Life... It's never easy..!

As the Government moves to make life simpler, everything gets more complicated!

It is official.

The day has finally arrived.

I can officially hug my parents. Wahey!

This is because since Monday, of course, hugging is back. And you would think that was a pretty simple concept to embrace – no pun intended. But what common sense tells us is easy these days is apparently not...

No sooner was hugging back than an eminent doctor went on the record saying that she would only be hugging close family, and not friends. Hmm...

Then the BBC interviewed a professor who, summoning up all of the academic authority he could, revealed that when you hugged someone you would be in close proximity to them! "Is it me," I'm thinking, "or are these people losing the plot!?" But that's not all...

Other helpful hints included such sage gems as "only hug people you know!" Wise words I would suggest, unless you want the police involved! A subsequent, and slightly less barmy piece of advice was to consider not hugging people who have not been vaccinated. So how is that going to work then? If you thought only hospitality had to wrestle with all this, think again! Now you need to briefly check a person's medical history in advance of your spontaneous expression of affection. Me, I need proof. If you are not wearing your vaccination card around your neck on a lanyard then... stay back!

Another brilliant insight was that people should consider wearing masks when hugging and also turning their head away from the other person slightly during the hug. And huggers were encouraged not to hug people for too long. Well, I can tell you from personal experience THAT is very good advice. Because that slightly too long and almost lingering hug I got from the attractive barmaid at our 'local' at her leaving do, got me into a lot of hot water with the missus I can tell you. Hey! It wasn't my fault! I'm the victim here!

As well as the complexities of hugging we now have the bureaucratic nightmare that is international travel to contend with too. Depending on where you go there is a combination of paperwork, testing and/or quarantining involved.

At first the new freedoms sounded appealing. A traffic light system – well we all know how to deal with traffic lights don't we. With the appalling spring weather we are having I could certainly use a bit of sun on me. But that possibility quickly evaporated when Simon Calder, of the Telegraph, was interviewed on BBC News 24.

Simon said that prior to Covid he used to travel within the Soviet Union and that the paperwork required was complex and daunting for all but the most determined

traveller. However, he conceded that the significant administrative burden involved with his Russian exploits was as nothing compared to the mountain of paperwork, tests and expenses now required to go to Portugal for a lads' weekend!

Apparently he noted that there were lots of no shows on the plane. Anecdotally he understood this to be because the cost of testing was four times the price of an air ticket. Simon explained that he got a cheap ticket to Portugal for £25, but that the cost of the tests necessary to get on the flight were £100. So, the anticipated sun-seeking exodus of biblical proportions from the UK does not look like it will happen any time soon. As the airlines give up so the testing laboratories take away.

Of course, all of this needs to be seen against a background of increasing concerns about the new India variant, as it has come to be known. Should we be concerned. Boris says not, but I am convinced that I saw his fingers crossed when he answered questions on this very subject. Will the vaccines work? Well Matt Hancock seems pretty certain. More important Professor Jonathan Van-Tam agrees and he's a medic, which means it probably is true!

The India variant was last tracked in 86 local authority areas. Clusters seem to be predominantly around 6 areas of the country. And some of these are cultural melting pots, which is doubly concerning as it seems to be ethnic minorities that have been most vulnerable throughout this pandemic.

So, the idea of flood testing and vaccinating a specific area in response to a surge in cases seemed to me to be a good idea. If you have an area that, for whatever reason, seems to be the target of the most virulent strain of covid then you move in quickly and get everyone vaccinated. Everyone. Not just the over 37s. That way the chances of the disease being passed from person to person is reduced dramatically. They are doing it in Glasgow. Brilliant! And they were seemingly doing it in Bolton. But now there is confusion.

Apparently, even where the Government is bringing additional vaccination resources to bear in an area you do not get vaccinated unless your name is on the list. Trouble is, lots of young faces were coming forward for their jab, perhaps overcoming significant vaccine hesitancy and queuing to get vaccinated, who were then turned away because the message had not been communicated correctly. Disaster! Just when you get people coming forward because they understand the need for everyone to be vaccinated for everyone's sake then you start turning them away. How much harder will it be to get them to try

again, when they are finally eligible. Another seemingly simple solution gone awry.

Deploying resources to those parts of the country that need them most reminds me of recent developments in the areas of retail. Years ago we stopped guarding all of the stores and just sent guards to the trouble spots, as part of an integrated approach to store security. Costs came down and shrink reduced at the same time. All good.

However, this idea of targeting resources in stock taking has still some way to go in getting universal traction in retail. And I cannot for the life of me think why. In the same way that some stores need more guarding and security than others, some stores need tighter stock controls to combat shrink. And given the enormous importance of accurate stock records in being able to fulfil customer orders and expectations it seems crazy to me that many retailers are still simply doing one independent count a year in all stores for accounting purposes.

Maybe that's it. Perhaps like other blindingly obvious great ideas, the messaging has been confused and so success sabotaged. So, I am going to have a quick go...

Stock taking is not just about financial compliance anymore. It is the difference between being able to compete effectively by having the right stock in the right place at the right time and, well, Debenhams!

Some of my clients are counting stock six times a year or more to prevent stock drift. The cost of not doing it is only partly measured by the cost of the misplaced or stolen item. Today the big issue is the bad press generated by the unhappy customer who has the tools on their smartphone to instantly tell the world how you have let them down.

And if that sounds farfetched then let me share with you some of the case studies and other materials that we have available, some created by the retailer themselves, to identify the benefits of multiple counts in certain store locations. You'll be amazed...

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