

The Power of Rituals



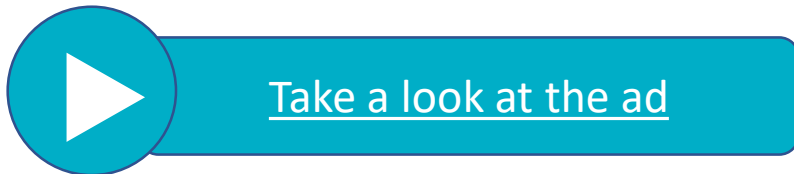
Back in 1999, the Budweiser 'Whassup?' was a gamechanger for the beer brand.

Whether you've seen it before or not, there's a lot to learn, and some of it is directly applicable to the situation we're in now...

The ad was based on friends of its creators, who fully expected the roles would be played by actors in the filmed piece. Only, it didn't work. Those actors lacked the shared history – and associated emotions – giving the catchphrase genuine emotion. So the agency turned to that group of friends to make the ad, and their celebration of real friendship helped redefine a beer for a new audience.

That ad campaign came from a ritual conducted largely over the phone. And there's a lot to learn from it which applies to people working from home. As the ad shows, it's best to use something that's already shared between participants.

- ➔ What could you utilise – in written or spoken words, images, or other reference points – that will help bring colleagues together?
- ➔ If there's not a universal shared example (and there may well not be), think through some examples that would be effective with particular teams, clients, or associates.
- ➔ Bear in mind the importance of sincerity. If you're not getting a good feeling as you recall the ritual, odds are other people won't either.



The Bud ad is just one example. A ritual is a way we organise the world for ourselves. Putting on particular clothes, going to a specific place, to meet people and work towards achieving agreed outcomes together – that's the stuff of tribes of all sorts, business ones included. Changing the location where much of the activity happens creates other changes, often unwelcome and with unintended consequences...ritual can help redress the balance.

- ➔ Consider some of the rituals you're familiar with from education. Assemblies. Class presentations. Graduation events. What elements were involved, and how did they make you feel?
- ➔ How many of the same elements have you come across in sports? Religion? Things your family does when you're together?
- ➔ What rituals have been part of your working history? Have you punched a clock? Attended a sales conference? Been part of the plans for a colleague who's leaving?
- ➔ Looking at what's worked well for you and others across that range of rituals, what ideas does it give for working in new ways during this present situation?



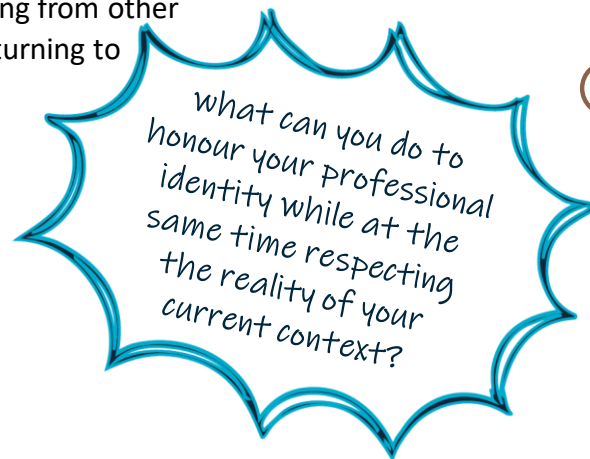
Different Rituals

The key question at this point is: what can you do to honour your professional identity while at the same time respecting the reality of your current context?

Think through the professional and personal demands of your day aware that you'll be fielding both, as will those you're in contact with. What are some reminders of the work environment that you can incorporate into your set-up at home?

- Items of clothing?
- Particular pens, notebooks?
- A work-related screensaver?
- A certificate for a course done with colleagues?

Create the habit of using, wearing, or having those reminders only when you're working. When you're not, put them to one side. Be scrupulous about that. And when you switch to your home self, include something from other parts of your life – family, loved ones, hobbies. In returning to work mode, remove it.



Different Relationships

By respecting that we're all operating under different conditions, with different pressures, the ability to keep working can be sustained or is possible. What's required is flexibility and tolerance.

Many people are reporting they have less energy available. It makes sense. A lot of what we take for granted has been shaken, which has consequences. Respect that. Find out what helps you recharge, and do so when you need to. Make that need clear to colleagues: it matters.

- Is there a space you can access where you can have time to yourself when you need it?
- Is there something enjoyable you can occupy yourself with that will get you on track? Listening to music? Playing a computer game? Phoning a non-work friend? Getting affection from a pet?
- What's the quickest way you know to improve the way you feel? Through exercise? Running upstairs? Stretching arms, eyes, mouth as much as you can? Breathing through your nose slowly into your belly 10 times? A quick meditation?