

## Building from the corona crisis to a sustainable future

Jo de Montgros

**Jo de Montgros:** Founding partner of renewable energy consultancy Everoze and Destination 0.

**Please could you tell us a bit about yourself and your background?** I work across a variety of renewable energy technologies helping on the project development side, on the financing and throughout the operations period – often with an engineering bias. I'm focused this year on a new start up called Destination 0. This is a not for-profit aimed at helping companies on their journey to net zero. An observation I made as the owner of a small business is that it's challenging to access support on your net zero journey - there's a huge focus in this field on large corporates and organisations. We are trying to fill this gap for the SMEs.

**How do we ensure that recovery is smart, fair, and green? And what do you think the focus of businesses should be here?** There are going to be differences between businesses and sectors in their starting points, but there is now a universal recognition that recovery from Covid-19 has to be sustainable. Over recent weeks I've been heartened to see that many major UK companies are promoting this message. Immediately, we need to keep people in employment; but this must be done without detriment to the longer term. I think this situation will force businesses to reconsider supply chains and may drive consumer activity at local levels.

**What priorities need to drive the decisions of our business leaders to deliver a sustainable future?** There are so many things that we just accept as business-as-usual. There has been a push back among some business leaders to re-evaluate how we approach shareholder returns, to say that maximising profit is not the only, or most important, thing. I think the first thing is to push back and set the agenda here.

During lockdown, we have seen that many people would like the opportunity to work more flexibly. People have had time to reflect on the balance of their lives. Some might even want to work reduced hours to spend more time with family, with nature, or to be engaged in volunteering activities in their communities. I would like to see businesses accommodate these changes. I would also like businesses to take a more life-centred approach to their culture. I am working to promote businesses doing more to partner with nature and conservation

organisations, to bring these important ideas into their strategy, to help them develop a long-term vision aligned with protecting future generations. Ultimately, I also think shareholders should be demanding these kinds of changes, as well as financial return from businesses.

**What cultural, behavioural and societal change do you think are needed to move toward a more sustainable future?** I think the most visible aspect of this is the community spirit. Where people live in villages, as I do, we have seen people come together to help each other out. People in cities have been doing the same thing on their streets and with their neighbours. We need to build on this spirit; rebuilding communities needs to be at the heart of what we are doing.

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For those that have been in sustainability for a long time, societal change is a topic we are familiar with, but it can still be difficult to open a conversation about sustainability or climate change. It can make people fearful and uncomfortable. After being confronted with a shock like Covid, presenting another fear inducing and difficult topic to people may turn them away. We have to be mindful of this, and also present hope and positive actions as we talk of recovery from Covid.

I think this is where the arts come in. I live in a technical environment, but we never present our data analysis without thinking about the communication. We know that when we are presenting our data, the method of delivery is so important. I think art and art institutions will have an enormous role to play in bringing to life the stories that show our impacts and actions on the natural world. The different mediums provide an accessible way for individuals to become engaged. Allowing and enabling people to become involved in this creative process, to build a vision for a sustainable future, is going to be very important.

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