



**COVID-19 – CMEFS WEEKLY NEWSLETTER**

**FRIDAY 01-05-2020**

Hello. I do hope that this week's edition of our newsletter finds you and your family as well as can be.

As you know, this week has been a very short week with only three working days in all, being Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

But what makes today, Friday, special is that we have moved one notch down to Level 4, and although for many of us the difference might be marginal, if at all, it is nonetheless now only 4 levels away from zero, which is one level less to go than 5, so in that alone, there is hopefully reason to feel some cheer.

However, now being allowed to exercise between 6 am and 9 am had me walking our beautiful dog Smiley around the block today for the first time in a very long time, something he enjoyed thoroughly, as did I and the MANY others who were out in the sun with us either walking themselves, their dogs or being a bit more energetic and jogging!

Those were the days my friend! ☺

In so far working from home is concerned, which we will be continuing to do for some time to come, we are still experiencing a whole host of challenges.

It is not easy, and it's very expensive.

Some examples of "it's not easy." (There are reasons I am discussing this with you. Bear with me.)

Computers break down and need to be fixed. This was easy in the "old" days when they were simply picked up from our office, repaired and then returned. Now they are at everyone's homes, so when they break down they need to be transported across great distances to be repaired and then when repaired, transported great distances back again. And of course, no work can happen until the computer is repaired and returned, resulting in a massive loss of otherwise productive time.

And then there is the worry, traveling in both directions, of being "arrested" by some over-zealous member of those policing the shut-down, despite having the necessary documentation in place.

It happens.

Further, programs that should give you uninterrupted remote access to your computer just decide “not to work” for reasons of their own. And they do this often. We keep a track of this. When this happens, as it often does, as already said, no work can happen until the programme decides to allow you remote access once again to your remote computer, resulting once more in a massive loss of otherwise productive time.

Then we have the inevitable network issues. The networks are taking a lot of strain with everybody locked down at home with their only access to the outside world being via their computers and/or cell-phones. Then there are the Netflix etc downloads and the “gaming” that is going on. I don’t think the networks were designed to cope with this amount of traffic and are doing well, I think, under the circumstances. But it is frustrating when you are trying to access your remote computer and can’t do so because there is just no bandwidth available at that time. Again, this results in a massive loss of otherwise productive time.

In the rush to get prepared, all of our employees were given Vodacom SIM cards to load with data so that they can access their remote computers whilst working from home, and although Vodacom have a good signal in some places, in other places the signal is either poor or non-existent. So looking ahead, we need to change some of these SIM cards in the next few weeks, with all the attendant logistics problems of getting the cards themselves, and then getting them to the individual homes.

And then of course (and this time it is not Eskom with their load shedding) we have had times when the power has just failed in certain areas. (And this for some reason seems to happen a lot in Umkomaas. Maybe the infrastructure serving the area is on the point of collapse?) Although we have given our employees UPS’ (battery back-ups) these UPS’s are very expensive so they only last about 15 minutes or so before they give up the ghost. And the power outages generally last a few hours, during which time nothing can happen so again, this leads to a massive loss of otherwise productive time.

Some examples of “it’s expensive.”

Because we are accessing our individual office computers remotely, what this means in effect is that each employee now needs TWO computers to do their job. One computer at home and one at the office. As you can imagine, this is an expensive exercise and as it is we are still two computers short, both of which are in the process of being purchased.

Then, of course, all of the duplicated hardware must be loaded with the necessary (and again duplicated) software to be able to operate at all. A further expense.

Then, of course, all of the computers need a modem and SIM card to be able to connect to the remote computer as well as gain access to the internet itself for client servicing purposes. A further expense.

Then, of course, there is the huge ongoing expense of having to buy data for the SIM cards. Buying data sounds simple. But it’s far from that. Depending on workload and usage, an employee may only use 1 GB of data a month or they may use 3GB or even 5GB.

But you only know how much at the end of the cycle. And these (barely affordable) data packages run for 30 days and then BOOM, game over, no roll-over.

So if you buy 5 GB anticipating a huge workload, and the employee only uses 1 GB because it was a “slow” month, say “goodbye” to 4GB which you paid for but do not have the pleasure of using.

But if you buy 1GB to prevent this from happening, and it happens to be a “busy” month, 5GB of data bought in 1GB packages turns out to be WAY more expensive than making a one-time 5GB purchase, so again you lose money by trying to save it!

This is no way to work and I think that the networks need to make their packages both cheaper and more flexible to help accommodate those of us who are trying our best to avoid the spread of the virus by voluntarily working from home. As things stand, they are making a fortune off of us and no doubt many others, and to put it mildly, I am not very enamoured with them right now. (Having written this I have just sent an email to Dr. Dlamini-Zuma outlining my concerns and asking that pressure be put on the networks to bring the cost of data down further given their no doubt increased volumes and to allow unused data to roll-over until ALL of the lock-down stages have been lifted.)

Then, of course, you have to be able to contact our employees, and they need to be able to contact you, but out of respect for their privacy, we had to provide them with business cell-phones and then buy and top-up air-time as is necessary.

And so it goes...

The point being I am one small business of perhaps a million others that are doing our best to work from home to prevent a complete shut-down of the economy and the resultant loss of jobs that would follow.

I imagine the problems I am experiencing are in no way unique and I am sure they are common to all of those other businesses that are currently working from home.

And all of these problems land up in a figure that you see on the TV regularly, that figure being the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a country.

GDP can be increased or decreased by only two things.

The first being the RATE OF PRODUCTIVITY of the people engaged in any economic activity. With all of the problems we and others are experiencing working from home, there is no doubt in my mind that the rate of productivity has at least halved. And this is going to come out in the numbers in the next quarter. And the numbers to my mind, are not going to look good.

The second being the NUMBER of people engaged in any economic activity. The more people you have producing widgets, the more widgets you will produce, with the converse of this also being true. It is no secret that tens of thousands of people who were earlier engaged in whatever economic activity they were engaged in are no longer so engaged. Possibly even never coming back. So from this perspective too, I see a halving of economic activity. And this too is going to come out in the numbers in the next quarter. And again, the numbers, to my mind, are not going to look good.

In short, all of us need to look ahead and start preparing now for very tough times. This is going to be the new reality for years to come, even way after a vaccination or treatment for the virus is found and life has once again returned to “normal”

Please note that it is not my intention to “bring you down” with what I have said above, but rather to give you a view of the future so that when it does arrive, you will be better prepared for it than might otherwise have been the case.

Yes, there will be those of us who will have work and who will still be “well-off”, but we are at the same time going to have to come up with a solution to the huge future public debt overhang that is going to need to somehow be repaid, as well as how to feed, clothe and house the millions that will be unemployed for many years to come.

We need an entire change of mind-set. And this does not happen overnight.

And now a word from Nine.

Dear everyone, Many thanks for being clients of ours, and all I would like to add to Charles’ Newsletter is to say we trust that every one of you is able to be as safe as can be. Our thoughts reach out to you for your love and loyalty and we wish you, family and friends, everything of the best in the pathways that you have chosen to walk every day So lots of love from me, and trust all is as well as can be, and that you will all be alright and safe. Lots of love to all again. Nine.

Finally, please note that going forward, and for your convenience, at the end of every one of these newsletters you will find a full list of all of our employees who are involved in the process servicing and production, along with their status, responsibilities and contact numbers.

Until next time then, from Nine, me and all of us at CMEFS do take really good care of yourself and your loved ones.



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Charles Merrington  
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CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER® professional

Name	Division	Cell Number	Detail
Alicia	Wealth	063 434 8074	Learner. Servicing attaching to the following classes of business. Investment Accounts, Tax Free Savings Accounts, Retirement Annuities, Living Annuities, Pension and Provident Preservation Funds, Endowments.
Andrew	Wealth	063 321 7399	Intern. New business and servicing. Medical Aids & GAP Cover. In the process of migrating across to the Wealth Division.
Andrisha	Wealth	063 378 1473	Representative. New business. Investment Accounts, Tax Free Savings Accounts, Retirement Annuities, Living Annuities, Pension and Provident Preservation Funds, Endowments.
Bernelee	Tax	078 708 4536	Administrator providing admin support to Geraldine and understudy to Geraldine.
Brady	Wealth	071 843 3933	Representative. New business. Investment Accounts, Tax Free Savings Accounts, Retirement Annuities, Living Annuities, Pension and Provident Preservation Funds, Endowments.
Felicia	Risk	071 880 9576	Learner. Servicing attaching to Short-Term insurance, assisting Stella. Starting to obtain some exposure to Medical Aids, GAP Cover and Life Insurance.
Geraldine	Tax	083 754 1699	Head of tax division.
Jamie	Wealth	071 850 1389	Learner. Core responsibility being to produce and send out the monthly investment statements and to handle any queries connected to them. Satellite responsibility to assist where possible in the Wealth Division.
Luh	Bookkeeping	063 102 3313	Head of Bookkeeping Division. Professional Accountant (SA) SAIPA 30345
Nadean	Tax	063 026 1351	Intern. Administrator providing admin support to Bernelee and understudy to Bernelee.
Siso	Risk	060 376 6605	Learner. Starting to obtain some exposure to Short-Term insurance Medical Aids, GAP Cover and Life Insurance.
Stella	Risk	078 784 6462	Head of Short-Term Insurance Division.
Terisha	Books	071 858 3373	Intern. Bookkeeping Division. Data Capture and other functions relating to the bookkeeping Division.
Thabo	Risk	078 004 3864	Learner. Starting to obtain some exposure to Short-Term insurance Medical Aids, GAP Cover and Life Insurance.