

Ryan Morfin: This is Non-Beta Alpha. I'm Ryan Morfin. Today we're speaking with Sam Nutbean, Managing Director of Forum Recruitment, a executive search firm based in Melbourne, Australia, that focuses on the property sector. Today Sam is going to talk to us a little bit about the COVID-19 response in Australia from a personal, social, and economic standpoint. This is Non-Beta Alpha.

Sam, thanks for joining us today. I really appreciate your time. I know it's early in the morning over there. We'd love to chat with you a little bit about what you're seeing as it relates to the COVID-19 crisis that's going on, and how has it impacted daily life in Australia?

Sam Nutbean: Yeah. Thanks for having me, Ryan. Look, it's been an interesting couple of weeks. I think it really started to hit home for most of this year in Melbourne back on the 14th of March. It was just before the Australian Grand Prix weekend. It was about 8:30AM when I think they called off the F1 Grand Prix. And since then, it has spiraled. It's snowballed.

Ryan Morfin: So have people been taking this, since the beginning, the last two to three weeks, very seriously, more seriously than the government? Or has the government been putting in draconian measures and society has been kind of scratching their heads?

Sam Nutbean: I think people have probably started taking it seriously within the last seven days. Before then, I think people thought, "Well, it doesn't really affect us because we're not in the age bracket, so let's just continue on with our usual business." But what I have found is that the last two weeks things have progressively gotten worse. We're seeing cases starting to almost double every three days, which is starting to have a huge impact, and will have a huge impact on the hospitals and the intensive care units here. So I think whilst people are starting to take it serious now, we probably should have taken it a little more serious earlier.

Ryan Morfin: Have there been frenzies in terms of supply chain, in terms of stocking up on certain necessities? How has it impacted an Australian's day-to-day at the grocery store?

Sam Nutbean: Yeah. Look, we're fortunate to have probably three to four times the food that we do need here in Australia. However, that hasn't stopped people from panic buying. We've seen stuff such as toilet paper, hand sanitizer, and your usual groceries like long life milk, noodles, pasta, these sort of things, fly off the shelves. And the supermarkets just don't have enough time or resource to get them restocked. They've now implemented bans on what people can buy, and limit supplies of what people can buy. They've also brought in reduced operating hours to get the shelves repacked. And also implemented changes to training hours where they're allowing people such as the elderly and those that are more disadvantaged than others to get access to the stores, as well emergency service workers. So whilst we don't have a shortage, people are

obviously getting scared and panicked and starting to panic buy everything they can and hoarding it at their house.

Ryan Morfin: Has there been reports of price gouging or black market activity? I know here in the U.S., you can't get a roll of toilet paper to save your life. So I'm just not sure what you guys are seeing there in terms of those types of transactions.

Sam Nutbean: Yeah. Look, it is. I've got customers that work in the property space that own obviously large high rise office towers, that they can't even get toilet paper and hand sanitizer into their properties. So you're seeing and hearing stories of these sort of items being purchased or even stolen and shipped off overseas to other places as well. Yeah, it's very interesting times here at the moment.

The price of broccoli and carrots is probably the barometer of where we're at. I think the price of broccoli has gone up from about \$1 to \$11 or thereabouts, and same with carrots. Yeah, there is price gauging happening, which is disappointing to see, given the circumstances that we face ourselves in this nation.

Ryan Morfin: And so what parts of Australia are hit the hardest? And what implementation of guidelines has the government put in place? Or have they put mandatory actions in place at a local or federal level?

Sam Nutbean: Yeah. So far here in Australia, I think as of yesterday there were 3,633 confirmed cases with 14 deaths. I guess the death rate is quite low at the moment. In New South Wales, which is where Sydney is, there was 205 cases confirmed yesterday as of yesterday, which is always double the amount of cases here in Victoria. So that's quite a large number in New South Wales alone. And I think that it's been due to a number of international arrivals coming in from various things, such as boat cruises and airplanes. Obviously Sydney probably has more traffic, more than any other state here in Australia.

The government have implemented obviously restrictions around social distancing and these sort of things, so that is starting to have an impact, I think, now. But it still seems to be that people aren't following the guidelines or there is confusion as to what people are meant to be doing at the moment.

Ryan Morfin: And has it been a seamless integration of government policy into action, or have there been some flops like that cruise ship coming into Sydney?

Sam Nutbean: Yeah. Look, there has been, as I said, mixed messaging and miscommunication. I think there is confusion. I'll give you an example. They're saying that obviously certain retail stores can be open. So things like hairdressers, up until a few days ago, were allowed to be open. But if you go get a haircut there's a brand new person coming into a store, getting a haircut by a hairdresser who then touches 15 to 20 other people's hair, if not more in the space of their shift. So that was confusing for many people.

The government is saying essential workers should go to work, yet they're saying essential workers is anybody that has a job. On the other side of that, they're saying that you shouldn't be leaving your house. So that's where the confusion has come in, is that if you're an essential worker and you are currently employed in any job, you should be going to work, yet the fact that if you leave the house then that's frowned upon by society and by the government at the moment. So it's very confusing times for us, but I think at the moment it's just waiting to see what happens next.

Yesterday there was, here in Victoria, an incident of many people congregated on the beach down in the surf coast which is where Bells Beach is where they hold the World Surf League competition. And off the back of that now, I think we're going to see some more restrictions put in place.

Ryan Morfin: Do you think the government's done an about-face after the Diamond Princess Cruise fiasco where they let a few hundred people on the dock without checking temperatures?

Sam Nutbean: Yeah. Look, that was a bit of a gaffe for the New South Wales government. And that has had an impact. I guess because a lot of those people have gone off to other states around Australia, and some even headed over to other countries as well. So I think off the back of that, they have started really tightening down on anyone entering the country. And now there's restriction on people coming into Australia. So only Australian citizens and residents are allowed here, and anyone that enters the country now is now being put into mandatory lockdown in hotels and trailer parks and these sort of things to make sure that they're not leaving their hotels, and they're being manned by the border force and police offices within the individual states. So we are seeing a real significant shift towards making sure people are following the rules and abiding by the law.

Ryan Morfin: And so how has the stock market, the economy, and the job market, how they all fared given the last few weeks of turbulence?

Sam Nutbean: Yeah. It's been impacted significantly, but I think we're only really at the start of it. If you look at, there is a big national chain here that's been in operation for over a hundred years called Myer. They're a bit like Macy's over in United States. They've had to close their doors today and there's thousands of workers, I think there are about 5,000 or 10,000 workers that are being laid off because of that.

Qantas, our national airline, they've laid off 20,000 workers around at the moment. So 20,000 people without a job. They're trying to redeploy them into some of the supermarket chains that obviously are busy off the back of what's happening at the moment. Yeah, the economy is really starting to suffer and I think if we're not already, we're entering recession, potentially depression. The stock market has faced a significant drop. I think we're at that 37% down in the month of March alone.

Ryan Morfin: Well, it's been a tough 2020 for Australia with the wild bush fires, and now COVID kicking off. How are the Australians holding up from a social standpoint? And the first responders, I know have had a tough year. How are they holding up down there?

Sam Nutbean: Yeah. Look, it's been a really tough start to 2020 for many Australians. A lot of regional towns were burnt to the ground. There was nothing left from the bush fires that came through late last year and early this year. And then tourism, which those towns rely on is now suffering because nobody can leave their house and everybody is told to stay at home and not to travel.

So it has been a really tough start to the year, but we are a resilient nation. We're a nation that gets around each other and makes sure we support each other, and we will do that. The amount of respect we have for the first responders, those that are working in our medical field at the moment is amazing. They're doing amazing work, and they will continue to do so, and work long hours, such as including the fire fighters. We take our hats off to them and we applaud them. We'll get through this as a nation. We will be different. Things will be different, life will be different here. However, we will be stronger for this, and we will get through it together.

Ryan Morfin: Well, Sam, I thank you for joining us. Good luck to one of our best allies, Australia, and to you and your family. Thanks for that real context around what's going on down there and how things are progressing. We appreciate it. And we'll hopefully follow up with you again in a few weeks to see how the property market's going, but wanted to thank you guys for helping us get to our listeners real news versus some of the fake news that we have going on in the media today. Thank you so much, Sam. We appreciate it.

Thanks for listening to Non-Beta Alpha. And before we go, don't forget to subscribe and leave us a review on our Apple podcast or YouTube channel. Our next episode will feature a similar conversation with two gentlemen that are expats living in Singapore, also going through a COVID crisis. They're a few weeks ahead of Australia on the crisis, and we're going to talk to them about what the government's been doing to implement new technologies to track its citizens and if it's working or not. Thank you very much. And now, you know.