

Top Edinburgh recruiter says it's the end for handshakes

A top Scottish businesswoman and recruiter is urging the business community to permanently ditch the handshake, as the unhygienic and outdated greeting leads to the forming of unfair perceptions.

With social distancing measures set to prevent physical contact with those outside of the household for the foreseeable future, the previously customary greeting across western civilisation is now being challenged.

Betsy Williamson, the founder and MD of Scotland's dedicated financial recruiters, Core-Asset Consulting, hopes that we can now permanently "shake" the habit.

She said: "It takes something as ruinous as Covid-19 to re-evaluate some of our deeply-ingrained habits. But we must surely now have to now question what fate lies in store for the humble handshake?

"When you stop and think about it, there are a lot more reasons to ditch it than there are for keeping it.

"It's as ubiquitous an opener as the word "hello". You start and end every encounter with it – and yet as is now very evident – it is a clear way that we spread germs between people.

"With my recruiter hat on, I also know that interviewers can

form too much from initial impressions. They can view the shaking of hands as a way to receive non-verbal information about the applicant's personality traits.

"It's been proven many times that they'll then seek to verify this, often subconsciously. It's irrational, I know of candidates who've been extra nervous, for fear of giving away shyness, a lack of confidence or being overly submissive."

Based in Edinburgh, Core-Asset Consulting works in the financial services market, expanding in recent years to include the legal sector – industries where, until the spread of Covid-19, handshakes were an everyday part of doing business.

The handshake has existed in some form for hundreds of years, as early as the 5th Century, where it was likely seen as a way of conveying peaceful intentions. By extending the empty right hand strangers could demonstrate they were not harbouring weapons – and it is believed that the up and down motion was to free any concealed items hidden within sleeves.

The ritual has long since transcended its original purpose, becoming a normalised part of business culture.

Speaking about what could replace a handshake, Betsy believes we may avoid contact altogether.

She added: "Unsurprisingly, this isn't the first time we've been asked to social distance, with a "ban" on certain greetings. King Henry VI banned kissing in his court as a method of preventing the spread of the Black Plague.

"Our rituals will almost certainly have to change off the back of the current pandemic.

"Personally, I'm not sure elbow bumping or air high-fiving will catch on in an interviewing scenario or would be professionally acceptable.

“I can however, envisage the type of situation occurring where we just hold up a hand, facing the other party, to say hello or good morning as the standard greeting.

“We don’t need to shake hands to show our enemies we’re unarmed, however the ritual to extend some sort of greeting to other party will still remain.

“No doubt it will move towards something more reminiscent of the Vulcan greeting of “live long and prosper” than the 5th Century handshake.”

From the outset, Core-Asset carved its reputation within Scotland’s globally renowned asset management sector. However, the success of its model allowed it to expand across the wider financial services market. It now has dedicated accounting, investment operations and finance teams as well as Scotland’s thriving legal sector.

Its teams pride themselves on fully understanding client briefs thanks to being intimately associated with their specialist sectors and – by combining that with the latest tools and systems – can source the exact talent to thrive in the role.

Formed in 2005, it was born out of founder, Betsy Williamson’s desire to take the best of her experience of large corporate recruiters, applying the focus on infrastructure and training to a more sector-specialised business.

It proved both an instant and enduring success, with the business securing market dominance north of the border. As a specialist recruiter based in Edinburgh, it offers its clients tailored solutions for permanent, temporary, contract and interim positions.