

20 Tips for Leading Your Business Through Challenging Times



At one time or another, all teams and businesses will face challenges. Some of these challenges will be temporary and some farther reaching.

Our current worldwide battle with the COVID-19 pandemic has created waves of effects that may be felt by individuals and business teams for the foreseeable future. As hard as it is to fathom, we will get through to the other side, and life—and business—will go on again.

How can you navigate your business, your team, and your clients and fans through this time? **Here are 20 tips to guide you as a leader under challenging circumstances.**



Check in on your people.

In good times, it's a best practice. In hard times, it's a necessity. Theodore Roosevelt once said, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care," and this rings even truer in times of uncertainty. You may be distracted, tired, and weary from worry—but your team, your clients, and your customers may be, too. How you treat your employees during this time speaks volumes about your character. Take even a brief moment to ask, "How are you doing in all of this?" and they will remember.



Take inventory of your resources.

Prudent advice for any business leader during times of normal operations, assessing your resources during times of exceptional operations becomes crucial: your strengths, your supply, your sources of information, your infrastructure, and beyond. Your people are your resources, too (team members and clients alike). Make sure during these times you're still able to maintain a level of input and output that can sustain your business. If you can't, you'll need an alternate



Ask for input. To every extent possible, now is the time to involve your team and your customers in

your decision-making process. From every level—from the deck plates up—listen to every single word. Every voice is important. Even if people have only been on your team for two days, they may have a powerfully good insight. The statement "That's how we've always done it" should never fly. In the wise words of Helen Keller, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."



Communicate calm messages of support and well-being. In all your

marketing, as well as internal communications, stay tuned in and mindful of the emotional atmosphere surrounding your recipients. When you are

communicating with your fans and customers, resolve to be part of the solution to the troubles around you. Be a source of encouragement, uplift, and set the example for others to follow. Encourage others to think outside the box and seek positive solutions. Share what you are doing to help or what has worked for others. Demonstrate the example of the calm in the storm and provide helpful resources and words of wisdom for others to share.



Look at the big picture; take a long-term view. In

a challenging time, it can be difficult to stay focused on the day-to-day work that needs to be done. Some tasks may feel less meaningful in the moment, given the gravity of our current situation. In those moments, hold tight to the vision that your business is built for the long term. Take small and steady steps to maintain the crucial everyday aspects of your business so that one day you will find yourself on the other side of this hurdle—and thriving.



Partner with other business leaders to seek out solutions.

Everyone loves some good old-fashioned collaboration. Like Taco Bell and Doritos, Go Pro and Red Bull, microbreweries and food trucks, the examples of successful partnerships go on and on. One thing is for sure: There's something about teamwork, and we think it's the fun. If there's a missing link between you and your ability to better serve your customer base during this unusual time, seek out that link and make them a friend.



Set a good example.

As Albert Einstein said, "Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it is the only means." A confident and admirable leader sets the tone and the course for the journey ahead, allowing others to follow easily and assuredly.



Use this time wisely.

If things are slow in your business right now, there is still always something worth doing. Catch up on those honey-dos, spend some time taking care of yourself and your health, stay active and busy. In your business, use this time for long-term planning, learning new skills, and working on the little things that you often want to pursue but don't have time to during busy periods.



Look to past examples of great leadership in hard times.

We can often recall examples of remarkable and enlightening leadership during challenging times in our past. Look to those role models who helped you conquer hurdles throughout your life and your early career. What was

it that stood out to you about their example? What behaviors or words made the difference and helped you navigate those experiences? Life here on Earth is fundamentally a constant series of ups and downs, of trials and celebrations. As Mark Twain put it, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." We can learn from what was helpful in the past and most likely apply some of that learning to today's trials.



Hold to your values.

Whatever the situation may be, don't compromise your essential values for a short-term gain. Renowned leader and author Stephen Covey once said, "I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions." You have a choice at every turn, and at the end of the day, you need to live with your choices and be able to sleep well at night, knowing you made the best choice you could with all the information you had at the time.



Remember that you are learning.

When it's hard to justify what you're experiencing right now, and the purpose of going through this struggle, remind yourself that sometimes in business you are in a learning phase. Glean all the takeaways you can from this time. When everything is status quo and you are absorbed in the mechanical monotony of the daily grind, it's like being on autopilot. When suddenly everything stops, changes, and gets hard—that's when you start learning.



Offer outlets.

Encourage emotional and physical well-being. Many organizations have employee morale and wellness programs. Now is a great

time to emphasize those resources, and make it known that you fully support work-life balance. Focusing on work tasks during a time of great stress is difficult. Encourage your team members to take the time they need to be as healthy as possible.



Ask for help.

In challenging times, there are grants, resources, loans, and other types of support out there to help small businesses. Reach out, ask your community, network, and seek the support you need during this time.



Have faith in yourself and be strong in your capabilities.

You've started a successful business, from the ground up. You've navigated through the early years and growing pains. You can navigate this time and rise out of it. When things are hard, we just need to remember the wisdom of Christopher Robin (from Winnie the Pooh): "You're braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."



Continue to be generous.

While not everyone on your team will have the bandwidth to take on new tasks, there are likely to be those who want to help others in any way possible during difficult times. If you have the energy to lead a unified effort, now's a great time to come together to support a common cause. If your company could be uniquely positioned to offer support to your community and client base, go ahead and identify and empower team members who may have the passion and time to devote to a strategic charitable effort.



Keep a sense of humor.

Levity. It is a powerful yet underutilized tool. If the moment is right, seize every opportunity to inject a spirit of lightheartedness into your interactions and throughout your days. We are only human, after all. According to Michel de Montaigne, “The most certain sign of wisdom is cheerfulness.”



Serve.

Identify the current most pressing needs of your customers and search for ways to meet them. Dig deep for creativity and flexibility to allow you to bend in new ways you never imagined. In the long run, your ingenuity will be rewarded.



Let go.

You had a vision for how this year was going to unfold, and now unimaginable circumstances have blown your plans far off course. It’s hard, frustratingly hard, but some things are not in your control. The harder you try to fight them, the less energy you’ll have for the things you can control. This too shall pass. In the famous words of American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in his Serenity Prayer, “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”



Care for yourself.

You have to pull yourself together. Right now. You can’t lead a team or a business when you’re falling apart. Get outside, breathe fresh air, feel the sunshine, move your body. Do the essential things that allow you to be fulfilled, healthy, and ready to take on the world. In the words of Sam Levenson, “As you grow older you will discover that you have two hands. One for helping yourself, the other for helping others.”



Imagine the future.

Picture yourself one year from now or one day in the future when business has returned to normal. Our life experiences forever alter us, sometimes in small and imperceptible ways. We will never be the same after this year of life and experiences. We will be wiser, stronger, smarter, better prepared, more compassionate. Author Leo Tolstoy once said, “The two most powerful warriors are patience and time.”



“When you begin, you envision a better end but, when you get to the end, you see the beginning better.”

- Ernest Agyemang Yeboah (Ghanaian writer and teacher)

There are tough times ahead, but together we can get through them. Wishing you strength in yourself and courage in your leadership during the days to come.



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