

Donâ??t Just â??Go Back to Work.â?• Push Forward!

Description

If you donâ??t know where you are going, any road will take you there.

As work gets back in full swing, many of us are finding ourselves in new territory. We arenâ??t going back to the same company, the same customers, the same employees, or the same vendors. All of these have changed. As leaders we need to change our language, our mindset, and our action in response.

In other words, weâ??re not actually going *back to work*. Neither are our employees. Weâ??re pushing forward into a different world, and, at the same time, weâ??re helping shape it.

Leaders need to think about what has changed, so we can seize the new opportunities and meet the new needs that come with those changes. We need to get strategic and intentional, not just wait and see what happens. We need to build our own road. We need to create policies and SOPs that make sense for the new world weâ??re all going into.

Here are some questions to consider as you move forward.

IN GENERAL

How has this pandemic impacted our business? Whatâ??s changed for us? How might we respond to and leverage these changes? Consider all products, policies, processes, and SOPs. Look carefully at your team, your customer base, and your partner and vendor relationships.

To paraphrase hockey great Wayne Gretzky, where is the puck going and how can we skate to where itâ??s going to be? What new processes, changes in product, etc. do we need to implement? Big changes are not easy, but we must tackle them head-on and stay focused on moving forward.

Is there financial assistance we might be able to access? Put someone in charge of researching and applying for it.

Where might we cut expenses for things that no longer matter? On the other hand, is there anything we need to invest in (like new equipment or software) so we can better compete in the new marketplace?

What is our safety strategy? Safety will be paramount for all involved. As you think this through, consider every angle: temperature screening, cleanliness, workspace reconfigurations, remote work policies, minimizing travel, etc. You might make safety a new line item in your budget or even make it a part of your mission, vision, and values.

Do we need to bring in outside experts to help with any of these issues? Reinventing a company is a big deal. It is smart to seek advice and get help when you need it.

EMPLOYEES

Do we have the right staff for the current business situation? Should all furloughed employees return? Would some people be willing to move to part-time? The pandemic has caused people to re-evaluate their lives. Some may have found they value their free time more than they realized and can live on less than they thought.

Do we need different kinds of employees now (for example, more tech people)? The good news is thereâ??s lots of good talent now.

How have employee needs changed? Do they want to come back in? Continue working from home? A combination of both? (Lots of employees are dealing with childcare issues and need more flex time.) You may need to invest in more technology to allow for remote work and/or downsize office space.

How can we optimize our teamâ??s performance? Do people need training in new skills? Do we need to overhaul processes to increase efficiency as we ask people to do more with less?

What safety measures should we put in place to protect employees? Donâ??t just do it; narrate it. This will help employees feel better about coming back to work.

Do employees have new health issues I need to be aware of? This could include COVID-19 diagnoses or exposure, but also mental health issues. For example, social isolation may have taken a toll on some people, or spouses may have been laid off. These and many other factors are causing more anxiety or depression in people. Think about how you will respond to these issues.

How can I better communicate with employees? When people hear nothing, they tend to fill the information void with the worst possible scenario. Also, while you may assume theyâ??re watching the news and know whatâ??s going on, they may not be. Youâ??ll need to check in with them daily and in various ways (meetings, emails, etc.). An open-door policy is vital, as they will have many questions and concerns. They need to perceive you as available and willing to listen.

CUSTOMERS

How are our customers feeling? Have their needs changed? Do they still need what weâ??re selling? If not, what do they need, and how can we provide it?

Will they have concerns about coming back to our place of business? How will we ease their fears? Again, putting safety protocols in place is just part of it. Narrating them clearly and often (and teaching

employees to do so) is the other part.

How will we serve elderly populations and help them feel safe?

How can we better connect with and serve our customers in general? What they consider good service may have changed over the past few months. If you donâ??t ask them, you wonâ??t know.

Do we need to create or beef up our online presence? It may be that your customers have gotten so used to buying online that they wonâ??t come in. Perhaps you need a bigger digital platform.

How should our marketing change to reflect our customersâ?? new reality? For instance, with social media use up, do you need to increase your online presence?

VENDORS

Do we still need what our vendors are selling? As we strive to get lean and mean, is it time to make some tough choices and end relationships that no longer make sense?

Do any vendor contracts need to be restructured as we adjust to a new way of working? Call them up and talk about it. You may come up with great solutions that benefit both parties.

Have their offerings changed? Some vendors may be short-staffed or limited in the products and services they can provide. Be prepared for these shortfalls. Make a game plan to deal with them.

Do we need new vendors? Some may be out of business and need to be replaced. Or, you may find you need new ones as you outsource tasks you did in-house before the pandemic.

Finally, we need to ask one more big question: *As a leader, how have I changedâ??and what do I need to work on to carry my team forward?*

As leaders we may need more training or education in certain areas. We may need the help of a coach or mentor. We may need to pay more attention to our own mental and emotional health so we can help those around us who may be struggling.

I talk a lot about holding up the mirror. Itâ??s a lifelong need and itâ??s more important now than ever. We owe it to ourselves, our employees, our customers, and others to keep trying to get better as we create a new company to serve the needs of a new world.

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