

Prepare For The Unexpected As A Leader (and Overcome it with Grace)

Successful founders should recognize that strategies and plans can only get you so far. Managing events outside of your control in a graceful way is a major piece of operating as a great leader.

As much as managers want to feel fully prepared for all outcomes – the reality is that nobody really knows how tomorrow is going to play out. This fact has never rang truer than during the recent COVID-19 pandemic that sent the globe into a total shutdown. Leaders who want to excel need to understand how to pivot and develop solutions in a graceful manner during unexpected times. Those small business owners who are prepared to deal with adversity in an efficient way stand to gain the most.

Not only is adaptation to adversity a useful skill, but it can also be necessary in some cases. For example, many small businesses are one hiccup away from going under during tumultuous times. Ultimately, the fate of the business lies squarely on the shoulders of the founder.

Here's how to be proactive with issues as a leader and how to anticipate the unexpected in the best ways possible.

Understanding your weaknesses (and strengths)

Being self-aware as a business owner regarding your management weaknesses and strengths can be a great way to ensure that you're prepared for any unexpected event.

While you may have worn many hats over the course of your career - not everyone is cut out to handle all the things that are thrown at them. This is especially true in high pressure situations.

Prepare your team and staff members in different ways to handle the adversity that you may not be able to shoulder yourself. If it's an HR issue, you should be able to rely on HR or other competent staff members to provide a solution to the problem. Let those who are most capable deal with the issues as they evolve. Ultimately, your job as a leader is to remain at the helm of managing the outcome.

Successful small business owners recognize their own capabilities and are willing to lean on others during unforeseen events to get through it. Maintain a sense of leadership and respect but don't be afraid to take note of your weaknesses and prepare for situations that you may not be the hero in.



Plan with “Plan B” in mind...

Deadlines, KPIs and projected targets are all great ways to motivate your staff and move your business ahead. It's imperative to make sure that you're building in “buffer” time for when things don't go quite as planned. If things swerve in the wrong direction and you haven't adequately set up your programs for some adversity it may result in a serious spiral of finances, staff disruption, and even potential loss of business.

Build a plan that's shiny and beautiful in your eyes but keep a “plan B” in your pocket that's on standby if needed. Whether it's time buffers, strategy buffers, or social buffers – you need to make sure that you're ready for things to come at you sideways.

Don't let this be an excuse to worry all the time but do make sure that you take the necessary steps to feel prepared during unexpected events.

Grow and maintain your network (personal and professional)

Just like any tough time, it's necessary to lean on those around you. This is true both professionally and personally when it comes to unexpected events in a small business. Most times, founders seek out other like-minded individuals to help them figure things out. Maybe it's someone who has been through a similar challenge before or someone who is great at developing solutions. Either way, it's a great strategy to have people in your corner when you need them.

Don't forget that relationships go two ways. As a leader, you can't expect others to always be available to you if you don't mirror that same energy for them. Take the time to nurture these relationships and provide help when others ask for it. Often, these good deeds will be paid back with returns over time in the form of advice, assistance, or future opportunities.

Shift your perspective often.

With adversity and challenges also comes big opportunities. CEOs and leaders who can tackle unexpected events with optimism stand to gain a lot of potential opportunities. Or, at the very least, some great experience for management under pressure or during a crisis time. Just like anything else in life - not everything works out perfectly in business or in the workplace either.

Don't let yourself drown in worry - embrace acceptance!

Worrying can cause a lot of undue stress, anxiety, and mental or physical health issues. While part of your job is to bear the responsibility of challenging times – it is not the expectation that you struggle all the time as a manager. Learn to embrace acceptance around imperfection early and often in your career as a leader.

Be sure to surround yourself with positivity. Look for healthy outlets to vent (like therapists) when you need it. And if times get too tough for yourself to handle – step away or step down. It's easier to part ways with a business on your own terms than to struggle indefinitely and place your mental or physical health on the line long-term. ♦