

Crisis Recovery & Business Restoration

The power of communication to build better businesses



Navigating a global pandemic is new territory for every industry, business and leader. Many organizations worked from solid crisis readiness plans to guide the crisis response phase of the pandemic. Those businesses without crisis plans were able to quickly knit together essential strategies to move to temporary operating models.

Take the long view

All reasonable estimates tell us the pandemic will be with us for many months to come. It's far too early to know what the marketplace will look like and when it will begin to operate with predictability, but one thing is certain: the marketplace will be forever changed. What's worked in the past — for employees, customers and organizations — may not be effective in a post-pandemic world.

Move with caution and confidence

The initial crisis response has peaked, providing a moment for leaders to reset and re-plan. Proceed with caution and confidence. Unlike most crisis events, the pandemic has staying power. Plan for more waves of crisis response while advancing the organization into recovery and restoration. As leaders become hyper-focused on next-quarter operations and long-term planning, the need for communication will grow.

Communication is crucial

The C-suite may see the future, but many employees are still swirling with uncertainty. At the same time, customers and communities are continuing to "experience" your brand every day. What's your organization doing to nurture and strengthen crucial relationships right now? And what strategies are you building now to be a better business on the other side of the pandemic?

Communication is a core business strategy to move your organization through the pandemic and to a new future filled with possibilities. Here's how to integrate strong, effective communication into your crisis recovery and business restoration plans.

CRISIS RECOVERY COMMUNICATION

As organizations move through crisis recovery and restoration, leaders have a unique opportunity to re-ground and re-imagine the path forward. This work begins as soon as the immediate crisis response is managed and the situation begins to stabilize. It's still an uncertain time in the crisis lifecycle. Authentic, two-way communication is important to provide clear guidance, minimize misinformation and ensure alignment with employees, customers, partners and other stakeholders.

- **Re-imagine with purpose:** Business as usual is the past. Leaders have an opportunity to re-imagine a future built on better businesses. Purpose, mission and values-aligned organizations will thrive in a marketplace that expects businesses to stand for more than profits. This is an opportunity for leaders to really consider the organization's "why." What does, and what will, your organization stand for — and what will it stand up for?
- **Listen to learn:** Needs and expectations have shifted during the crisis response phase, and business strategies must adapt and evolve accordingly. Communication tools, including surveys, feedback channels and social media channels, provide valuable, direct listening and engagement opportunities. The insights learned guide the organization to better meet people where they're at today and make targeted adjustments for the future.

- **Lead with head and heart:** A crisis will take a considerable emotional toll on people. Acknowledging this toll and demonstrating empathy in words, tone and actions will strengthen emotional connections inside the culture and with customers, partners and communities. It is especially important for leaders to be present and engaged during this time, consistently sharing updates, checking in with teams and authentically living organizational values.
- **Consistent communication:** Be proactive. Anticipate what people will be thinking about in the days and weeks ahead and address their concerns and questions before they need to ask. Provide clear, consistent updates on recovery efforts, progress and the business rationale behind decisions. Keeping people connected to the plan and helping them understand the “why” behind decisions and actions will create understanding and focused engagement. Consider implementing a change management communication process to increase support for new initiatives.

BUSINESS RESTORATION COMMUNICATION

Moving beyond a crisis requires organizations to look backward and forward. Reflecting on lessons learned through a crisis and understanding how to carry those insights forward provides a roadmap for future events.

- **Debrief and update:** Thoughtfully reflect on the crisis and complete a SWOT-style analysis to gauge the organization’s response and management. What worked well and what can be strengthened? Be transparent with your conclusions, share highlights and insights, and update your go-forward crisis plan and practices to improve preparedness for future risks.
- **Communicate consistently:** Keep people connected to the business with frequent updates using various formats, across multiple channels. Share employee and customer stories to illustrate the strategy. Celebrate progress to unify teams and be open about opportunities to improve. A frequent cadence is crucial. It may feel repetitive at times, but consistency is reassuring and stabilizing when emerging from a crisis.
- **Lead by example:** Leaders play a critical role in moving organizations forward by setting clear expectations and behaving in alignment with values. Clear communication will keep people engaged, focused and understanding how they contribute to business restoration. During this time, it’s more important than ever for businesses to keep their promises and meet rising expectations from employees and customers.

Growth through crisis

Every crisis is an opportunity for growth. Employees, boards, investors and other stakeholders must be confident the organization has learned from past events and is better positioned and prepared to manage future events. Consistently communicating about lessons learned and the resulting changes, and sharing details about the path forward demonstrates organizational growth and leadership. Clear actions, supported by strong communication, instills confidence and builds trust. And that’s the foundation on which to build better businesses.