

## **Small businesses need to look ahead to reopening after virus**

Over the weekend, I saw a profile of Mary Poppins herself – Julie Andrews – and she relayed some wise words from her mother that can be a bit of a comfort to us all.

Andrews was a scared little girl living through the Blitz, the WWII bombing of London, when her mum told her to remember that “everything has a beginning, a middle, and an end.”

Indeed.

While we most certainly are not even close to the end of this scary moment, it is important to begin to envision what post-COVID-19 small business life is going to look like. The good news is that entrepreneurs are uniquely qualified for this exercise, as having a vision and defying the odds are part of our DNA.

When you will be able to reopen, of course, depends on a variety of factors: your locale's rules; the impact of the coronavirus in your area; and, not insignificantly, the willingness of your customers to head out and into stores and businesses again.

There are several factors that should go into your post-COVID-19 planning:

### **Safety and cleanliness**

This has to be No. 1 in your thinking because it is and will be No. 1 in the minds of everyone surrounding your business – your employees and customers alike. Needless to say, social distancing rules will be the norm for the foreseeable future. That means that the number of people allowed into your place of business will likely be limited. It also means that the way you have your business physically set up may need to change. Desks, displays, work spaces and more may all have to be rethought.

Here's how to do it right: My genius computer guy Peter from Bolt Computer just sent this email: “We have Clorox wipes, nitrile gloves and N95 masks on-hand. Only one client is allowed in the office at a time, and the chairs/desk/door handles/exit doors are disinfected every single time a client comes to our office. We are replacing our gloves every single time as well and disinfecting every computer and accessory that comes into our shop. If you come into our shop not wearing gloves you will be provided with hand sanitizer and asked not to touch your face. This may seem overly cautious to some people, but we are going to people's homes and businesses and we cannot risk being a vector.”

Having hand sanitizer and soap on hand, taking extra care in shared spaces, and cleaning regularly and conspicuously are all going to need to be de rigueur.

**Flex-work creativity** Undoubtedly, you have already implemented flexible work options. We are all Zooming and texting and working from home. The question is, should you continue to do this?

I say, to the extent it is safe and possible, no.

Of course I am not suggesting that you take a risk, but I am saying that if your business can be made safe and clean and visibly open, that will be attractive to people when the coast is, if not clear, then at least clearer.

That said, your team still will need you to remain flexible and creative about their work needs. Split-shifts, remote work and all the rest will remain necessary even after you re-open. With children at home and additional life challenges, employees will expect and require you to be flexible.

## **The market**

What your customers may want from you going forward will likely look different than what they wanted from you before the pandemic.

The answer? Be like a ball. Go where the new momentum takes you.

That product isn't selling anymore? Try another. Your tried-and-true marketing strategy has stalled? Drop it. That great webpage isn't getting any page-views? Onward.

No one said entrepreneurship would be easy, and it's not. But you can do it.

Just ask Mary Poppins.

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