



MANAGEMENT

ADAPTING

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[Al Schwartz](#)

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Just when you thought it couldn't get any worse...

Trying to predict what things will be like in July, when you read this, is difficult in the best of circumstances. In June of 2020 it is practically impossible. If having a worldwide pandemic that shut down our economy were not enough, the riots and protests over George Floyd's death happened and threw gasoline on a four-alarm blaze. These events, singly, are enough to knock everything we are doing business-wise—and socially as well—into a cocked hat, but when taken together they are like

the Tsunami that comes after an earthquake. Other than shaking your head in disbelief, what can the average person do to keep moving forward in the face of this societal disruption?

There is no clear answer to that question. At best, educated guesses and reliance on our own experiences will help to inform us on how to move forward, and move forward we must. Standing still in such times as these will get you run over if not by your competition, then by history itself.

With nothing for it, getting on with business is what we all must do. Upping your game is one way to tackle the problems that have arisen during these trying times. If you are still in business, reevaluate your company's mission and goals. Look at integrating new technologies and procedures into your everyday operations. Streamline. Cut the fat as close to the bone as you can, and see what that looks like.

Cutting down excess overhead is usually the first place most of us look when trying to save a buck or two. Selling off vehicles and other hard assets is one of the first things we do to cut expenses (maintenance, fuel, insurance, etc.). That is the easiest place to start, but you cannot leave it at that. These times require hard choices if you want to emerge on the other side of things leaner, meaner and still in business.

Kindness, understanding and compassion are great traits in a boss, but they should also be tempered with realism and the hard-nosed ability to make the tough choices when tough choices need to be made. The most difficult thing to do, for most good bosses, is to lay off help. Of course, some help is easier to lay off than others, but it is never an easy thing to do in any event.

Notice I said "layoff" rather than fire. When the time comes to fire someone, there is usually a good reason to do that and the emotional quotient does not come so readily into play. Laying someone off because you can no longer afford to keep them on your payroll is quite a different matter, most especially if they have been a good, loyal employee.

If your workload has diminished, without any prospect on the horizon of it increasing soon, reducing your work force as quickly as possible is one way to stop hemorrhaging cash. Laying off quickly, while always a difficult decision, takes some of the pressure off, and gives the laid off employee time to find either another job (in today's marketplace, a good, qualified employee who is laid off will probably have several offers in short order), or apply for unemployment benefits in a timely manner. This advice comes from hard-learned, personal experience. Trying to keep your people busy while you are slow might be a good strategy under more normal circumstances, but in present conditions, or other times of economic stress, it can eat up your cash reserves quickly. Remember, if you are in this for the long haul, you need to have a long-term strategy.

Another way to get back to an even keel is to streamline. If you have been reading this magazine lately, I'm sure you've noticed the preponderance of articles touting "digital" this or "digital" that. Looking at adopting, or adapting, some of the newer technological advances into your business, with an eye toward making the most of you and your employees' time, is probably an idea whose time has come.

The use of fleet scheduling software, both for service scheduling as well as vehicle service, might be a good place to start. Scheduling your service people using the new digital software available is another. Having your employees use iPads not only for communications, job scheduling and sales presentations, but for inventory control as well can pay dividends.

One of the best shops I ever worked for (way back in the stone age) had a method of keeping service trucks perfectly stocked at all times. At the end of the workday, as each truck came back to the shop, the boss had the dispatcher pull all the service tickets, pull replacement stock from shop inventory, and put it in a box for each serviceman to restock his truck the next morning. This simple process kept every service truck fully stocked at all times and was a great time saver.

With the new digital technology available today, it would be an easy thing to do an automated version of that process and adding the reordering of shop restock at the

same time. Do not underestimate the value of this sort of efficiency. It translates in to \$\$\$'s quickly.

The bottom line here is to take a deep breath, and do everything you can think to do to keep your business going and profitable. Innovate, adapt, make lemonade out of the lemons we've had handed to us. The most important thing is that you not fall victim to despair. You are in a tough, but rewarding business. It's worth your effort. Good luck!

The Brooklyn, N.Y.-born author is a third-generation master plumber. He founded Sunflower Plumbing & Heating in Shirley, N.Y., in 1975 and A Professional Commercial Plumbing Inc. in Phoenix in 1980. He holds residential, commercial, industrial and solar plumbing licenses and is certified in welding, clean rooms, polypropylene gas fusion and medical gas piping. He can be reached at allen@proquilldriver.com.

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