

6 lessons from the pandemic that leaders will carry with them

While the COVID-19 pandemic certainly was not a welcome event, it did serve as a learning experience for many leaders. The events that transpired, and their impact on many businesses, drew a clear distinction between successful businesses and those that couldn't keep up. A key part of that distinction came from an organization's leadership. Those who could adapt, adjust, and engage in continual learning, were able to lead their organizations through difficult times. While those stuck in their way saw businesses flounder and in many cases fail.

While we hope that we won't have to deal with new pandemics anytime soon, the business world is constantly being disrupted by new innovations, companies, and world events. That means that the lessons learned here are ones that will continue to be necessary for years to come. We've collected advice from leaders from a variety of industries about issues that rose in importance and the valuable lessons they learned during this unprecedented stretch in global history.

Be flexible

When COVID-19 entered the picture, it threw most businesses for a loop. While some tried to wait it out in the hope that life would soon return to normal, others realized that adapting to conditions proved a sounder response. Adjusting work locations, hours, and procedures allowed many organizations to continue operating — while also providing workers the opportunity to deal with the effects of the pandemic on their personal lives.

The experience highlighted the importance of building a staff that can go with the flow instead of being firmly set in its ways. It also showed leaders the potential value of rethinking how things are done.

This was the case for Elice Max, co-owner of [EMUCoupon](#). Her company deals with clients across the world in different time zones, but she clung since its founding to a rigid 9 to 5 schedule even though it caused communication issues.

"I briefly explored the idea of flexible working hours before the pandemic but was too afraid to take the chance. I thought it would put the company in unfamiliar territory and create needless complexities," she says. "The pandemic in many ways forced my hand. When the lockdowns began, we had the opportunity to try flexible working hours, and things began to improve almost instantly. Communication with clients improved, and my employees too began to favor flexible working hours. We now operate on a hybrid team model with both in-office and remote employees that have flexible hours."

Some changes that seemed unthinkable months earlier, quickly became the norm out of necessity. However, it shouldn't require a global pandemic to open your organization up to more flexibility and changes in its way of thinking.

Embrace technology before it's a necessity

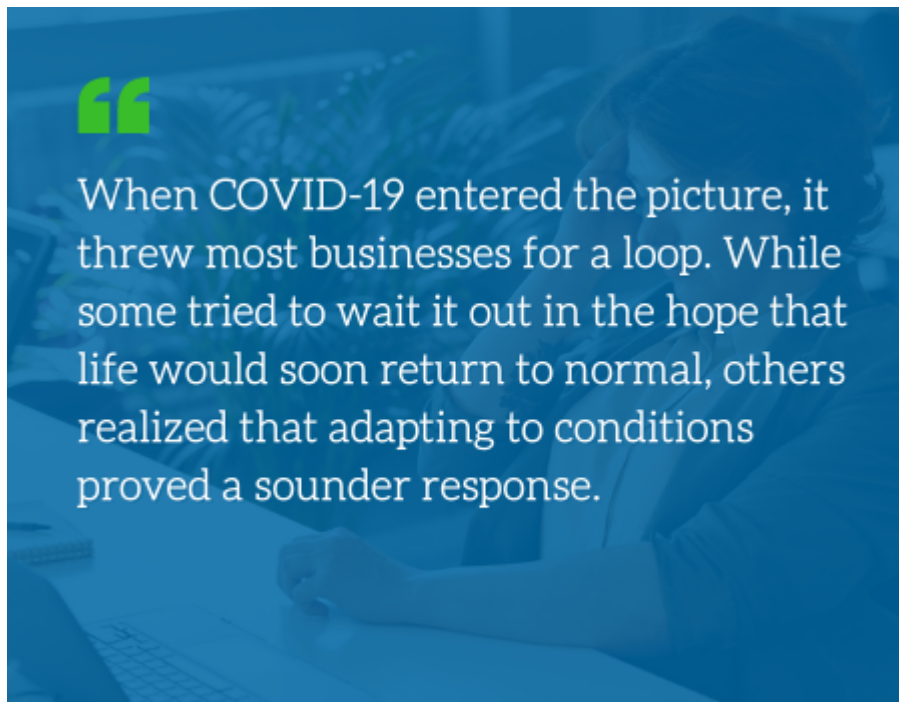
Yes, most businesses have relied on technology to at least some degree throughout the 21st century. The pandemic, however, brought its power and importance to the forefront. People who had never video chatted in their lives became Zoom regulars. Teams turned to Slack to mimic the watercooler conversations suddenly missing from their days. Ensuring everyone had the passwords, know-how, and ability to access databases from anywhere became a priority. And online security measures skyrocketed as operations moved beyond office walls.

The dependency on technology stirred a new appreciation of the possibilities available in the modern world — and of the need to know how to use it.

“What my experience in this recent time period with the pandemic has taught me is the gap in technological knowledge that exists in the current workforce,” says Isla Sibanda, entrepreneur and cybersecurity specialist at [Privacy Australia](#). “We need to implement strategies that will help our employees become better adept at dealing with technology. Having an in-depth knowledge of how digital technology works is extremely important for an organization’s survival and success. A lapse in this process, I believe, also exists from the managerial end. As leaders, we need to acknowledge the need for training that is required to help our employees stay ahead of the times and not fall short when the need arrives.”

Quality communication is key

When the pandemic forced teams into remote situations, clear communication became a top concern. Colleagues no longer were just down the hallway, and managers could not simply pop into a cubicle to relay instructions or answer questions.



Adding to the turmoil, employees new to off-site work longed to know if they were doing things “right.” Conveying new productivity metrics and expectations proved vital to job satisfaction and performance. Check-ins from their manager and group video conferences helped ease concerns and build a sense of community.

“It was a novel experience as we moved to remote working for the first time during the pandemic. And this is what we realized — the number of miles between you and your team does not matter, the quality of communication does,” says Dan Skaggs, founder of [One Thing Marketing](#).

Without a designated communication channel, his teams had to move between emails, Microsoft Teams, and other services to contact different colleagues. “This was extremely inefficient and unacceptable,” Skaggs says. “This is when we realized the importance of strong communication and connectivity — both in-office and out. We soon formulated a proper channel and created schedules for different work activities. This remains a lesson for us!”

Empathy is a must-have year-round

No two individuals have experienced the pandemic in the exact same way. Some people dealt with sickness themselves or in their household. Others went through financial problems or job loss. Those with children handled care and schooling issues.

Many feared for the safety of themselves and their loved ones. Anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges abounded.

Because of the variety of situations, leaders discovered they could not always take a one-size-fits-all approach to management. They needed to look beyond work concerns to truly understand what employees were going through.

Phil Strazzulla, founder of [SelectSoftware Reviews](#), notes that his biggest problem was that team members were from different countries and thus faced different issues in their places because of the pandemic.

“The time differences made it harder as some had to go and buy groceries in long lines at a particular time in the other part of the world, and here in the U.S., we had a completely different set of guidelines,” he says. “The important lesson that I learned from all this is that numbers don't matter in front of our health, especially during a worldwide health crisis. The key to managing personnel at such a time is to be empathetic and actually listen and care about what's happening in their lives. It really did make a difference and helped us move on strongly!”

A work-life balance benefits everyone

The shift to remote work opened many eyes to the possibilities of better juggling personal and professional obligations. Managers and employees alike found satisfaction being around family more often and bending schedules to make life easier.

However, people also discovered the odd nature of working and residing at the same place. Without making a conscious effort to unplug and relax, it's easy to feel like you're “on” 24-7.

“Working from home during this pandemic is such a great privilege. I get to help my wife care for our kids, and I get to work on my side business as well,” says Alex Shute, editor-in-chief of [FaithGiant](#). “One of the things I've learned during this pandemic is to have a clear work-life balance. It is essential to have a hard cut-off of when the working hours start and finish throughout the working day. It has been a challenge to keep a balanced schedule, but we are very strict on finishing our working day at 5 pm and having family time until our kids' bedtime. If there is work that my wife or I need to finish, we do it after the kids are in bed.”

Positivity is powerful

Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic caused turmoil throughout the world. Maintaining hope through chaotic and uncertain times is far from an easy task.

Leaders emerged with a new sense of what it takes to navigate uncharted waters. Never has the importance of a can-do attitude been so apparent.

“I'm a big believer in the importance of a positive mindset, and the pandemic only reinforced my belief,” says Marie Unger, CEO of [Emergenetics International](#). “I learned how important it is to channel my energy, focus on where we need to go, and not dwell on fear. That focus on the horizon and believing we could get there helped me be more resilient, and it helped my team be more resilient. Stay focused on your company's purpose. When you can clearly articulate what you are trying to achieve and what you will deliver to the world, it's much easier to lead because you can cut through the noise to prioritize what matters.”