A SHORT GUIDE TO PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

Simple steps to help your business get through.
GETTING YOUR BUSINESS READY TO ‘GET THROUGH’ IS PARTLY ABOUT DOING SOME PLANNING AND PARTLY ABOUT ENSURING YOU DEVELOP PRACTICES TO BECOME MORE RESILIENT.

This short guide will take you through steps that help you with both. Each area will have a what, a how, and a why. There are also links to further resources at the end of the guide. It’s not hard.

There are simple, practical easy things that will get you well on the way to surviving in a crisis and potentially thriving in the aftermath.

Action list summary

This list is intended to get you started with simple practical actions that can start building your organisations resilience. Pick one – and get started.

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- Make connections with industry members.
- Plan a morning tea crisis scenario session with staff.
- Compile a staff contact list that can be accessed in a crisis.
- Review how you store electronic data and backup systems.
- Ask a staff member, “what is our business about?” to strengthen unity of purpose.
- Ask a staff member for problem solutions and ideas for improving the business.
- Think: how do I lead, would I follow me?
- Organise a social event – get to know your team better.
- Test your backup plans for working from an alternate location.
- Make time to work ON your business, not just in it.
Awareness of external environment

**Don’t rest on your laurels** – sure you worked hard to get your business running smoothly but don’t stop now. You need to be constantly alert to changing conditions. Crises for your business are not necessarily natural disasters; a slow creep of changing customer tastes can be just as critical for your business as an earthquake.

**Be involved** in industry and local business associations and networking groups; get to know your neighbours, your customers, your suppliers, your competitors, your local community.

**Review** – Is your insurance cover adequate for today’s environment?

**Ask** – Why would people stop buying from us?

The more people you know and interact with, the more information they will funnel your way that is relevant to your business. This information may enable you to adapt your business before a crisis develops. In a disaster situation, these relationships may well be what gets you through – perhaps your competitor has spare equipment that you can borrow, perhaps your neighbour has spare space you can utilise if yours is damaged, perhaps your suppliers will be thinking of your needs ahead of their other customers.

Identify core business needs

- What are the things your business needs to operate and how might they be vulnerable?
- How vulnerable to damage are your premises?
- How vulnerable are your key suppliers?
- What are your risks in getting things you need to operate?

The easiest way to do this is to have a morning tea or Friday drinks and put some scenarios to your team. These can range from the simple; if you are a bakery, then discuss “what do we do if we come in one morning and the oven does not work?”, to the more complicated “what do we do if there is a fire in our building and everything inside is damaged?” Make sure you consider people, premises, processes and technology.

The point is not to come up with right or wrong answers but to explore what your options may be, as well as revealing the key vulnerabilities of your business. These sessions may result in follow up plans or agreements with others, or they may simply provide you with a pre thought out course of action that can be easily set in motion in the heat of a crisis.

**Don’t do this alone** – your staff will have ideas, access to other networks or resources and they need to be ready to roll these out in the event of a crisis – remember, you may not be there when a crisis strikes. If your staff are not used to being involved in the firm’s decision making, then this is a great way to get them involved, which grows their sense of ownership and loyalty – but it may take time for this to develop. **Make it fun and keep repeating it.**
Getting back together

- Do you know how to contact your staff, your suppliers, and your key customers if your IT system is down and you cannot get into your office?
- Do you have alternative contact information for when landline or mobile networks are down?
- Does anyone else in your organisation know where to find this information if you are not there?
- Do your staff and their families have a plan for communicating in a crisis?

Just do it! Compile a list; make multiple copies in both electronic (mobile phone, USB stick, or in the cloud) and paper format and diary a reminder to check that it is up to date periodically. Talk to your staff about what they, and their families would require during a crisis.

Being able to contact each other is a key first step to beginning recovery from a major disaster. How much of those precious first few days following a disaster do you want to have to spend on such simple tasks when you could be getting on with the process of getting back into business.

Backup your data

Be clear about what data is critical to the operation of your business. Most firms ensure their accounting data is backed up – but what about your customer contact lists, process manuals, important contracts? Is the information stored on your mobile phone also stored elsewhere? Is there always a backup copy off site?

Ask yourself these questions:
- Where is your backup data stored?
- What kind of disaster would destroy your backup data too? How do you reduce this risk?
- How would you restore that data? What equipment do you need? Is that easily obtainable?
- Do you need to consider other options such as cloud computing?
- What vital business information is NOT on your computers or backups?
- Does anyone else in your organisation know where to find and retrieve this information if you are not there?

Generally, the quicker you can get your key systems up and running, the less interruption to your cashflow and risk of customer loss.
Be clear about what your business is trying to achieve

In the event of a crisis, *speedy decisions are often needed* without all of the information you may normally rely on. You and your team need to be really clear about what your business is all about. Can you state this in 3-4 sentences?

Ask each staff member to state what your business is all about in 3-4 sentences. Do you get different answers? Perhaps, you need to remind them once again! Have staff create their best “Superhero Elevator Pitch”. Get them to practice how they would describe the purpose of the business in the time it takes to ride an elevator.

Unless you and your staff are clear about your goals and priorities, you cannot restore your business in the event of a crisis.

Cultivate open-mindedness and adaptability

If you have a rigid way of doing things and seeing the world, then you will have difficulty in adapting to the new circumstances presented by a crisis. These are skills and ways of thinking that can be nurtured and grown in good times but they are unlikely to suddenly emerge in a crisis.

Consider how often your team comes to you with an idea for improvement? How often have you implemented them? Being receptive to ideas and innovation in both process and product does not mean you have to implement them all – just ensure you do not stop the flow of thinking and ideas – you will need them in the harder times.

If innovation or creative thinking is not your thing, perhaps someone else in the business can be this champion?

Are you the go-to person for any problems or issues? If so, then start trying to cultivate your team’s ability to come up with solutions by asking them what they suggest. Remember, that you may not be on hand when a crisis develops.

The ability to *adapt your business to the changed environment* that may present itself in a crisis is one of the key skills that will ensure your survival.
Leadership

**Would you follow you?** Think of leaders that you admire and then consider how your leadership compares.

**Be brave** – ask a neutral person to ask your staff for their honest views about your strengths and weaknesses as a leader and be prepared to take actions to moderate those weaknesses. If you are not sure how, ask a trusted friend or pick up a book on leadership at the local library or online. Leadership can be learned. Look out for local organisations like the Chamber of Commerce, offering free leadership skills seminars.

**Good leaders can inspire and produce hope.** Crises often require rapid decision making and the ability to communicate decisions so that others see both the desirability and achievability of the task at hand. There is no one right way to be a great leader but acknowledging your weaknesses and attempting to moderate them – trying to behave in a way that you would wish to follow can have a powerful effect on morale, loyalty and work-effort.

Staff engagement

You cannot have all of the ideas or solutions yourself – **two (or more) heads are better than one**. In a crisis situation it is very likely that you will be overwhelmed by the number and magnitude of decisions to be made. You need to utilise the talents, knowledge, and potential networks of your staff. There are proven benefits to doing this during your day-to-day business, not just in crisis environments.

**Involve your team as much as possible in the day-to-day decision making and running of the business.** Encourage their sense of ownership and pride in the company – make sure there is a feeling that you are all in it together.

Remember everyone will react differently to a crisis – it is really helpful to have as many people to call on for help as possible in case some cannot be there.

**If your business fails, staff lose income, workplace friendships, and the sense of purpose that work provides.** They have just as much of a vested interest in the business continuing and succeeding as you do. If you acknowledge this then together you can be a powerful force
FEELING OVERWHELMED?

TO BECOME MORE RESILIENT, YOU HAVE TO FIRST MAKE TIME TO WORK ON YOUR BUSINESS, NOT IN IT.

You probably feel you don’t have enough time!
How do you make the time?
If you are spending all of your time maintaining the day-to-day operations, then who is working on improving, growing, and ensuring your business endures? No one! You can turn a vicious cycle of problem solving and fire fighting into a virtuous cycle of improvement, but only by stepping back and looking at the bigger picture. Sometimes you have to take a risk and bring in someone else to take on the day-to-day so you can focus on improvement. Perhaps sitting down and recording what you do spend your time on for a week may show you which tasks are not the most productive use of your time?
If you cannot see a way out from the day-to-day, get some help. Speak to a friend or a colleague or your local Chamber of Commerce about how you are spending your time, how you would like to be, and how to bridge that gap. Don’t wait for a crisis to develop, ask for help now.

Testing and keeping up to date

We all know that practicing physical evacuation is a good idea to discover any flaws in your escape routes and make the process automatic. Business resilience is similar, every test you run (be it restoring from your backup tapes or working from home or another location for a day) will enhance both your mental preparedness and check for flaws in your plans.

Test those things that are vital for your business operation. Refer to the lessons learned in identifying your core business needs, and ensure any plans you created are tested, at the very least ask “But what if ……..?”. If you have physical backup systems (e.g. power, phones, IT) then switch over to them once a month. Conduct a trial restore of your computer data. Continue to run new scenario exercises at least annually, preferably more often.

Planning for crisis is not a one-off event. Make sure your preparedness evolves as your business and its environment evolves. Keeping up to date is crucial to ensure the relevance of your plans. Testing is about mental preparedness and keeping you and your team fresh and current.
Detailed Action List

1. Get involved in your industry association or your local Chamber of Commerce. Get to know your neighbouring businesses, your customers, your suppliers and your competitors.

2. Organise a morning tea or Friday drinks crisis scenario session. Put a scenario to your team and make notes as to the issues and potential solutions raised.

3. Compile a contact list for your staff, key suppliers and customers and store it in multiple electronic and non-electronic forms.

4. Talk to your staff about what they and their families would require in the event of a disaster.

5. Review how and where both your electronic and non-electronic data is stored. Consider how you (or someone else) would actually access it in the event of a disaster?

6. Ask each staff member to state what your business is all about in 3-4 sentences. If you get different answers then take action to gain a unity of purpose.

7. Cultivate your team’s ability to solve problems by asking for their suggestions when an issue arises.

8. Ask a neutral person to ask your staff for their honest views about your strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Consider how you could best use those strengths and improve the weaknesses.

9. Involve your team as much as possible in the day to day running of the business – grow the feeling that you are all in it together.

10. Test your backup systems. If one of your back-up plans is to work from home, do it for a morning. If you have IT backup systems, practice a restore.

Further information

Organisational resilience
www.resorgs.org.nz
www.resilientbusiness.co.nz

Crisis management and business continuity planning
https://getready.govt.nz/prepared/work

Backing up data/cloud computing
www.ready.gov/business/implementation/IT
https://www.cert.govt.nz/business

Personal preparedness
https://www.civildefence.govt.nz
https://www.ready.gov
https://www.getthru.nz

Want further help or advice?
Contact a business, trade, or industry association near you. They can be a good source of local business advice.
Further reading

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<td>Tips, tactics, and plans for managing your business through a crisis</td>
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This guide was developed by Resilient Organisations Ltd, a research and consulting organisation based in New Zealand. We have been researching what makes organisations resilient to crises since 2004.

See www.resorgs.org.nz for further information.

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