

Business Lessons from COVID-19: The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown

Flexibility Key to Success

Be Transparent with Employees Despite Uncertainties

OKLAHOMA CITY, May 27, 2020 – Full-time remote work for employees was out of the question for most companies a few short months ago, but after weathering a pandemic that changed how we work almost overnight, business owners say there are several lessons to take away from this time—the good, the bad and the unknown.

Increased reliance on technology was one of the most visible changes companies were forced to make as states enacted shelter-in-place orders. Employees' homes converted to makeshift offices almost overnight.

But the quick transition wasn't all bad.

"Some of these technologies were always a 'would be nice' in our minds, but we were always too busy to investigate and adopt," said Jan Riggins, manager for two Express Employment Professionals offices in Fort Worth, Texas. "Now that we are using them, we can see how much stronger we will be as an organization as we emerge from this."

Todd Isaacson, Express franchise owner in Longmont, Colorado, agrees that more video interactions will increase worker efficiency and time management.

"People will be much more amenable to these types of interactions because their time is better used and less risk of exposure," he said.

The same convenience of technology, however, doesn't necessarily replace in-person employer/employee interaction.

"The new difficulty will be how to promote and grow employees to take the next step and move up to the next position," said Daniel Morgan, Express franchise owner in Birmingham, Alabama. "It will be a struggle because more businesses may just hire for the position and

people may not be able to advance their careers as much.”

Biggest Takeaways for Employers

As business owners and managers begin to look in the rearview mirror at operations during the pandemic, Riggins says successful companies realized flexibility was key.

“I have been very interested to see the response of employers during this pandemic,” she said. “Some were nimble and quickly adjusted. I think those are the organizations that will provide the example for others on how to navigate change in the future.”

Transparency as an organization was also key during this time of great unknowns.

“Regular communication with staff has always been important but it was/is crucial during this COVID-19 crisis,” Isaacson said. “Employees who don’t know what the boss is thinking or planning makes them nervous. Silence is not golden.”

This time has also allowed owners to re-examine business operations, such as streamlining budgets and how to run more efficiently, Morgan added.

“Too often, we are all too busy to get into the details of running a more efficient business, and now owners have more time to analyze the best ways to run their business,” he said.

At the Express office in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Director of Manufacturing Excellence John Keuning says a return to pre-pandemic employment levels may take several years and worries employers will do whatever it takes to stay afloat.

“I believe we will be fighting a long economic recovery battle that might cause bad decisions to be made about compression of work, workload, and cutting safety and/or quality corners,” he said. “We all must be true to values and missions.”

Lessons for Employees

Two distinct groups of employees emerged over the past few months in Riggins’ mind—those who remained employed and were expected to be grateful, and those who “lost their jobs and were lumped in with the masses of others in the same situation.”

“I think those who will come through this most successfully and who will provide an example for others are those who were flexible,” she said. “Whether they were still working or not, if they were able to figure out how to keep learning, how to be flexible in their job, or how to provide support for others, they then navigated this pandemic successfully.”

And in a time when so much in every area of life seemed out of control, Isaacson suggests identifying what you can’t control and let it run its course.

“Seeing what you can control and doing the best with that helps organize thoughts and alleviate feelings of hopelessness and helplessness,” he said.

Ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic will undoubtedly be felt by businesses for years, said Express CEO Bill Stoller.

“While it’s easy to take a high-level look at the damage the virus has done to companies, not everything has been negative,” he said. “We have learned to be more grateful for good health, appreciate each other more and lean on one another for support. We will come out of this on the other side better thanks to the resiliency and determination of the human spirit.”

If you would like to arrange for an interview with Bill Stoller to discuss this topic, please contact Sheena Karami, Director of Corporate Communications and PR, at (405) 717-5966.

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment Professionals. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, the international staffing company has more than 825 franchises in the U.S., Canada and South Africa, and beginning in 2020 will expand to Australia and New Zealand. Since its inception, Express has put more than 8 million people to work worldwide.

About Express Employment Professionals

At Express Employment Professionals, we’re in the business of people. From job seekers to client companies, Express helps people thrive and businesses grow. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, OK, our international network of franchises offer localized staffing solutions to the communities they serve, employing 552,000 people across North America in 2019. For more information, visit www.ExpressPros.com.