

After a Disaster, Rethink Your Business

The California fires are burning more than just trees and brush. They are wiping out whole towns. That is more than an inconvenience. That is a disaster for the businesses in those areas. What will things be like afterwards?

When a disaster strikes, hurricane, tornado, flood, fire, or theft, it is common to first try to get the business back running again. However, many times, it is not possible to recover exactly. Take this time to rethink the business. There can be serious benefits to doing so.

It is hard to rethink a business when trying to handle the daily crisis. A disaster can be a good time to do so. A disaster often changes our market. When a disaster like a hurricane

hits, it can change the market for hundreds of miles around us. That alone is a good reason to rethink the business.

Disaster planning generally falls into two groups, Business Continuity Planning, and Disaster Recovery Planning. Both of these have the general assumption that the business still has a viable market to serve during and after the disaster.

Disaster Recovery Planning is reactive and is the planning of how to handle any number of specific disasters. Disaster specialists work up possible situations and plan strategies for handling them. The planning itself and the drills help the organization cope with disasters that nobody could have foreseen. For example, the company in the World Trade Center had practiced drills for

many things, but could not have predicted the plane crash. The same drill got most of the people out of the building alive.

Business Continuity Planning is proactive and is the planning needed to make sure that the business is able to keep functioning through and after a disaster. In simple cases, it is simply making sure that the retail store can still function (take money, swipe cards, etc.) if the Internet is

down or the electricity is down. I've seen restaurants that let customers leave without paying because their Internet connection was down and they couldn't process the customer's credit card. In complex situations, Business Continuity Planning deals with cyber-attacks, supplier

Markets May Disappear Or Change

bankruptcy, and international political situations.

But neither of these two planning styles asks the question of "Is the business headed in the right direction?" They are strictly about continuing the current business.

One observation from the study of human fossils is the finding that humans have come through very drastic changes in climate. We are adapted to rapid change – far more than most other creatures. Rapid change also describes modern business. We can't assume that our business will be the same next year (and sometimes, not even next month). We do well to rethink our business any chance we get.

After a disaster, questions to ask are: Does my market still exist? What other markets do I want to go into? Do I still have the supplies, resources, and personnel to meet the customer needs?

Start Over from the First

One of the first lessons in college physics is to not follow your instincts. We have so many assumptions about how the world should be working. But, when we measure, we often find things to be different. Repeatedly in life, we do well to start over by thinking that everything we know is wrong.

We can watch a young child talk about how things should be. They tell others, "No, it goes here." Often, it doesn't fit there. Or they tell adults what the adults should do. We smile and play along knowing that the child will have to learn that their ideas of how the world should work are wrong.

In today's world, adults now need to switch careers and start over. In our fast-paced world, jobs disappear and people need to move on to a whole different way of working and learn something new. We need to walk away from old knowledge and learn something new.

This is especially true in any company that uses software – which means nearly every company in America. Software styles, platforms, equipment it runs on, and the user expectations change radically every few years. While software written 20 years ago might work fine as long as it is able to run on DOS, it may no longer meet the needs of today's business and may need to be updated or even totally rewritten so that it can be accessed via the web from any mobile device.

We start over learning new fields. The companies that are able to walk away from old technologies, learn new skills, while maintaining the values that made the company profitable are the ones that will continue to thrive.

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Risky World

Helium makes your voice sound funny, but also messes with recent Apple devices. Turns out that small amounts of helium messes with the clock inside Apple devices and makes them shut down completely. A hospital was installing some equipment and leaked helium. The result was every Apple phone in the place going dead.

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