Different Boats for Different Folks
by Bob Zaruta, President/CEO, NWIRC

We hear frequently these days the phrase… we're all in this together. For many, these words offer encouragement, hope and unity. I came across an old quote by Jacques Cousteau that caught my attention. The French naval officer, scientist and marine expert once said, “The sea, the great unifier, is man’s only hope. Now, as never before, the old phrase has a literal meaning: we are all in the same boat.” Some today could easily replace the word ‘sea’ in Cousteau’s quote with ‘virus’ and immediately connect and find comfort.

I would offer that manufacturers are not all in the same boat. Manufacturers are in the same treacherous storm, and in the same unchartered sea, but each company is in a different boat trying to best chart and navigate to the other side. Like vessels at sea, companies are different sizes, serve different industry subsectors, and have varying structures and levels of business maturity.

Over the past six plus weeks, I have spoken with numerous manufacturing leaders. Each of these companies seem to have its own set of perceptions, issues, and needs. The primary reason is that people make up a company and people have been impacted differently during the pandemic. I heard about employees taking voluntary leave of absences to reduce their health risks. Others that needed to be at home to attend to children with schools and day care facilities closed. Retaining employees, creating confidence in workplace safety and training new employees were discussed to varying degrees during my conversations. Also, there were varying degrees of concern, and anticipated potential impact on a company’s future workforce, expressed due to the extra unemployment compensation.

Manufacturers are also in different boats depending on pre-COVID business conditions and how the organization has been able to operate, or not, during the pandemic. Customer demand and ability to pay, supply chain readiness, and cash flow will present varying situations and challenges during the recovery period. Even the very start of the recovery period for businesses will be all over the chart.

For more than 30 years, the NWIRC has strived to be a trusted advisor and the go-to-resource and thought leader for small and medium sized manufacturers in northwest and northcentral Pennsylvania. While many variables and unknowns exist, and assurances are not plentiful these days, know that the NWIRC is here, ready and able to assist you, your employees and business. You can count on that! For those companies who have grown throughout this storm, we remain confident that our traditional services to help you plan strategically, strengthen your standing in the market and align products and services with new customers will continue. For those companies who need to recover before moving forward, we have developed a no-cost COVID Recovery Program along with our partners so that we are prepared and have the resources available to help. In addition to conducting a business assessment of each situation, this program will provide a cash flow analysis and develop a short-term tactical action plan tailored specifically to your business needs. We will help you identify and prioritize the actions needed to take the next step and will connect you to experts and programs to begin charting a new course as we begin to come into calmer waters. As part of the COVID Recovery Program, we seek to ensure manufacturers throughout the region will exit this storm stronger than before, perhaps all having gained some lessons which will help stay the course in the future. We understand not all are starting from the same point, but using situational fluency and responsiveness we will do our very best to help you grow and move forward into the new normal. You can count on that too!
Pandemic Management Strategies
by Todd Sturgeon, Sturgeon Consulting

COVID-19 has impacted businesses across the nation. Business leaders face new challenges and changing government mandates daily. It is a difficult task to balance production demands, executive mandates, and employee apprehension.

A good place to start is creating a written pandemic program to help manage the current situation, and future outbreaks. This document serves as the foundation for ensuring employees and customers that you have procedures in place to safely continue operations. Some key components of the program include:

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<thead>
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<th>Pandemic Management Plan</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Pandemic coordinators</td>
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<td>• Employee education</td>
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<td>• Prevention protocols</td>
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<td>• Cleaning schedules</td>
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We discussed these program items in detail during a recent webinar hosted by the NWIRC. Most organizations have adopted new COVID-19 protocols. However, it is important to regularly review key program areas.

Engineering controls are important to implement. Discuss installing higher MERV rated filters with your HVAC contractor. Making process modifications, redesigning work stations and break areas, and installing physical barriers can be effective for increasing social distancing.

Administrative controls are an essential component of any pandemic management strategy. A few items to remember: Encourage sick workers to stay home; modify or suspend meetings and trainings; adjust or alternate work shifts and breaks; provide employee education on pandemic protocols; control visitors, vendors, and deliveries; and implement a detailed cleaning schedule.

It is critical that you respond correctly to confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases. Your strategy should cover isolation, communication, cleaning / disinfecting, cleaning products, and monitoring.

COVID-19 could be a seasonal threat, as well as new virus or bacteria strains. The seasonal flu and common cold cause significant employee absences each year. Consider adopting into your regular business culture some of the practices currently in place. This would include regular education on hand washing, social distancing, coughing/sneezing, etc. It also warrants the possibility of maintaining your staggered breaks, lunches, and some production schedules. The modification to meetings, training, and business social events must also be reviewed.

The lessons learned and new protocols established during this pandemic, can be beneficial for the future. The positive impact from COVID-19 could be that your future absentee rates are decreased. Employee morale and retention could substantially improve.

Promote your pandemic management program to your customers. Your customer relationships could strengthen with the confidence that pandemic management is part of your business continuity program.

Side Note: Request a link to view the recorded-webinar, How to Safely Maintain Business Operations During COVID-19 Challenges featuring Todd Sturgeon, by emailing: mreichard@nwirc.org.

Leading During a Crisis
by Susan Hileman, NWIRC Strategic Business Advisor

We are in a new era. You may be working in the office, on the plant floor or even at your kitchen table. It’s fair to compare the COVID-19 crisis, as one writer noted, to swimming in the ocean.”It gets hard to keep track of exactly where you’re going, and sometimes, it’s challenging just to stay afloat.” Whether leading in a crisis or the day-to-day working world, here’s five best practices for good leaders.

1) Communicate More. You just can’t over-communicate. It’s particularly important during stressful

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times to reach out on a regular basis. Remind your employees of the big picture, of what’s most important. Even though we may be unsure of tomorrow, instill purpose by talking about the company’s vision. Share ‘why’ you’re in business. Focus on keeping your team members aligned and help them understand how their personal best contributes to the whole team.

2) Use Technology. Whether you’ve become proficient on Skype, Zoom or GoToMeetings, these last 4 weeks have taught us all new ways to use technology to help our business. When I’m teaching Generational Diversity, manufacturers are encouraged to look for ways to integrate technology into their business. Consider automation and production monitoring systems. Use iPads on the shop floor. Develop better dashboards based on your key performance indicators (KPIs) so that everyone has a pulse on real-time operations. Create video work instructions. Identify those in your organization (younger, as well as more seasoned) who find technology fascinating and ask them—what could we be doing? There has never been a better time to explore how to make technology work for you!

3) Build Trust. Trust is built by people being truthful and being real, by being compassionate and having empathy for others. Real leadership is about creating an environment in which employees feel like the company cares about them. People will remember how they were treated during this particular time, so allow your actions to speak louder than words. As Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence wrote, empathy and “compassion—caring about other people’s well-being and taking action to improve it—stands as a hallmark of outstanding leadership.” Right now, we need compassionate leaders we can trust at all levels more than ever.

4) Be Coachable. Being coachable is as much about affirming what’s being done right as focusing on what can or should be improved. Use this time to lead by example. Be intentional about your personal growth. Improve listening skills, get feedback from others and evaluate constructive criticism without taking it personally. Coachable leaders are willing to be uncomfortable if it means the end result will produce something better. Taking this opportunity to upgrade personal skills could provide the most significant return on investment (ROI) for you personally and the biggest impact to your business.

5) Lead in the Moment. This period was recently coined the “Great Pause”. Take advantage of this moment in time to turn your business around. Revise outdated policies. Right the wrongs in areas where “that’s the way it’s always been done”. Look at the shop floor. Use this slower time to get organized and improve efficiencies in your process.

Update your website and use of social media. Be sure to communicate with customers even if you’re closed! Consider the strategic direction of your business. Is this the right time to focus on new markets, customers, products or services? Perhaps even look at reorganization or restructuring staffing/roles. Funding opportunities will take some of the stress off knowing that people and bills are going to be able to be paid. So, use the Great Pause to actually address issues which get pushed aside during the normal daily grind. Your business will definitely be better for it!

NWIRC has staff who can offer expertise and guidance in many of these areas mentioned. Don’t hesitate to reach out if we can help you in any way.

AND THE WINNERS ARE....
Visit www.WhatsSoCool.org to view all the winners of the regional student video contests.

Digital Assistance

If your company wants to explore digital solutions to improve your business operations, NWIRC can conduct a no-cost, 30-minute data/digital assessment to determine points of vulnerability, prioritize project consideration, and make a connection to the region's digital consultants to provide insightful technology solutions and alternatives.

Project area may include:

- 2-Factor Authentication to get your staff securely logged into on-premise servers from remote locations
- Secure FTP [file transfer protocol] solutions to comply with secure data transmission requirements
- Network and system penetration testing to ensure your ports and entry points are locked down
- Building and egress electronic security to manage access to your assets
- Data and systems integration services to get your information to where it’s needed in the form you want

If you're ready to move your technology forward, contact NWIRC at (814) 217-6067 to be connected with a Strategic Business Advisor.
YOUR STRATEGIC BUSINESS ADVISORS

If you have questions, or would like to speak with someone from NWIRC about services, please contact your Strategic Business Advisor (SBA):

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Phone Number</th>
<th>Counties/Regions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tom Weible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Susan Hileman</td>
<td>814.572.2077</td>
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<td>Lisa Pustelak</td>
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<td>Andrew Idzik</td>
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UPCOMING EVENTS

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, we’ve added many free webinars to our event schedule, offered by NWIRC and by industry expert sources on a variety of topics. Check the schedule often at www.nwirc.org/events.

Webinar: May 5
CARES Act: Provisions & Forgiveness of the PPP Loan

Webinar: May 6
Applying Critical Thinking in Chaotic Times

Webinar: May 7
Best Practices for IT Security While Working Remotely

Webinar: May 8
Keeping Employees Calm Through COVID-19

Webinar: May 12
Communicate with Confidence During a Crisis

Webinar: May 13
Redefining the Norm for Business Continuity

Webinar: May 14
Virtual Collaboration Tips for More Productivity

Webinar: May 14
Coaching Through COVID-19 Disruptions and Beyond

For more information or to register for training, visit www.nwirc.org