

Inspiring Business Resilience





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How prepared are we for those big life events? Like buying a home, getting married or having children?

We may think we have our bases covered but reality always throws up some surprises!

The stages of creating, building, and growing a business are no different. People rarely go into business 100% prepared. That's not a criticism – making mistakes and learning from them is one of the key defining moments for many SMEs and these experiences often set them up for future success. And, let's face it, anything as monumental as starting your own business is hard to truly prepare for.

What makes all the difference is how we react and deal with situations, in essence our resilience. This is possibly the most important thing that a business owner can work on, as it will define how you bounce back from a tough situation. It will determine if you are able to face down a challenging time, come out the other side and use the learnings for future success.

What it's not about is dealing with a tough situation by yourself. Our research revealed the extent to which SMEs in the UK feel alone. It's unsurprising to us to find out that thousands of business

owners have felt adrift with no help – it's what we hear from many of our customers when they first talk to us. What we also know from working with so many amazing businesses every day, is the transformative power that the right help can have. We see it day in and day out and know that the right help can make all the difference to building a resilient business.

Through the good times and the hard times, resilience is what keeps us going. We're passionate about supporting the SME market, and are proud to have helped so many resilient businesses. To help you prepare for the challenges that may lie ahead we've launched our resilience campaign. We're creating an online hub of resources to help SMEs build their resilience. We're partnering with experts from a range of sectors to support us in this, to offer advice and guidance that will have a meaningful, positive impact on business owners. To get things started, we've put together some of our top hacks, tips and inspiration from experts, customers and our team.

We'd love to hear your thoughts and please get in touch via hello@ultimatefinance.co.uk with any feedback.

Wellbeing

We all know that working life can take its toll, on employees and owners alike. Workloads can become demanding, stress can mount and there are often plenty of tricky issues to deal with.

SME owners in particular often fail to take care of their own wellbeing, so focussed as they are on running their business. But, being in good physical, mental and emotional health is going to be crucial to building personal resilience. If you're ill or haven't slept properly in days, it's not likely you'll be in the right frame of mind to deal with a crisis.

Resilience and wellbeing are therefore inherently linked. In fact, the World Health Organisation

defines wellbeing as the state in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community.

Coping with stress and working productively is also key to resilience, so it's no surprise the two are almost impossible to separate.

Keeping on top of your health is easier said than done however. The first step is a health MOT. You can do this yourself by asking a few simple questions. If you can't answer yes to more than two of the following statements you need to start making some health changes.

WELLBEING CHECKLIST

1

A holiday once a year is critical to refresh yourself. Have you been away in the past 12 months?

2

Taking time off during your working week is a must to unwind. Have you had an evening off this week?

3

Spending time with friends and family is proven to support mental and emotional health. Have you enjoyed some uninterrupted time with your loved ones recently?

4

Eating regularly and healthily every day is important for physical health. Did you have a good meal today?

5

Exercise keeps you healthy and produces endorphins which make you happier. Have you gotten any exercise this week?

The good news is that it is never too late to start working on your wellbeing and taking steps to improve this area of your life can have a big – and pretty rapid – impact.

Emotional intelligence



Emotional intelligence is one of the key elements for being a truly successful business owner, yet few business courses feature modules on how to develop it. In fact, despite it not being a new concept, it's really only in recent years that the importance of emotional intelligence has been recognised. It's very name – emotional intelligence – or as it also known, emotional quotient, makes it sound inaccessible – something you're born with or without. It's no wonder that few understand it, when it sounds as elusive as 'charisma'.

The thing is, emotional intelligence is not an innate skill. It can be learned by anyone.

The essence of it really, is learning to take a step back and assess a situation.

That may all sound well and good when you say it. However, demonstrating emotional intelligence in a make or break business situation is a little harder, especially if it doesn't come naturally to you.

When it comes to resilience, we have no doubt that this is the core area to invest energy. The impact that it can have on almost every part of your business is far-reaching and transformative.

SO, WHAT DOES EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ACTUALLY ENTAIL?

1

Emotional awareness, which is the ability to harness emotions and apply them to tasks like thinking and problem solving

2

Emotional management, which includes regulating your own emotions and cheering up or calming down other people

It may sound a little obvious that being good with people is important but let's be honest, not everyone is a people person 'people person'. And that's OK. Recognising where you need to improve is a good first step. There are a number of good books to support self-help and talking to a business coach is always an option. There are plenty around, all it takes is a quick google.

Are you managing or leading?

What's the difference between a manager and a leader? Sounds like the start of a slightly rubbish joke doesn't it? But there is actually a serious answer to this question and it's important that business owners learn the distinction, especially as your business grows. At the start, having a hand in everything was essential, but as your company gets bigger this won't be possible.

There is a difference between management and leadership. A good manager organises, sets tasks and oversees progress. But a leader sets the vision and takes strategic decisions that will affect the company's future,

and empowers others to help in this mission. This is often described as the 'push and pull'.

To enable your business to grow, therefore, you need to develop leadership skills.

Some people will take to this more naturally than others, but some of the skills and attributes can be learned. That is why it may be worth getting a mentor or coach who can bring out those skills in yourself by helping you analyse your strengths and weaknesses and discussing how you'd act in certain situations.

CHECK OUT OUR THREE HACKS TO BECOME THE BEST LEADER YOU CAN BE

1

MAKE PEOPLE FEEL IMPORTANT

A great leader can engage every single person in the company and make them feel indispensable. Treat every member of the team with the same generosity and respect. Always make sure everybody knows they're essential for the wellbeing of your business. If your employees feel empowered and self-confident, the business will yield higher results.

2

ESTABLISH A STRONG COMPANY CULTURE

A great leader has a strong team pulling in the same direction. To create such an environment, your business needs a strong company culture. It will make employees feel part of the team and focus their skills on improving the business. It starts with you and not only benefits the workforce but increases the likelihood of talent coming your way.

3

EMBRACE MINDFULNESS

Learning how to relax your mind will give you clarity, increasing the likelihood that you'll take the time to consider your options before making decisions rather than acting on instinct or becoming unnecessarily stressed.

People - your most valuable investment

Do you remember the day you hired your first employee? I bet you do! It's a bit like buying your first home and feeling like a true grown-up; your first member of staff means you've done it – you're no longer a one-man band. This is the start of something bigger!



But much like a house, hiring staff comes with the commitment of constant investment. And requires skills that you may not have had to worry about previously. It can be a minefield.

Human resources, better known as HR. Or 'the people department' because that is effectively what it is. It's about finding and training the right people for your business. For small businesses, this is a highly pivotal area – a recruitment mistake can cost the earth. The right people are absolutely crucial to a resilient SME.

As a small business, you're probably going to have a compact, close-knit team. You might think this will make managing HR and people issues easier. But sometimes when issues arise it can actually make it more difficult with personal relationships getting in

the way of making a tough business choice. This can lead to make or break decisions like keeping an employee when you really shouldn't.

There are lots of resources out there for SMEs; the CIPD in particular has a great small business resource, with lots of legal advice.

But it's not just about the 'legals'. It's also about motivating, engaging and inspiring your team to create the right atmosphere for productivity and growth – retaining great people is absolutely key to a successful business. It should also be about having fun when you can. Work should be enjoyable, after all.

The business owners that are on top of HR requirements and people issues will be the ones who are best-positioned to deal with whatever they're faced with.

At your service

Good customer service is something that some brands master and maintain, while many more do not. There isn't one approach, but it is reliant on behaviours and actions that leave a mark:

THE GOOD "I Left my bag on a train over Christmas, which also had my passport in and I was flying to a wedding in Dublin the following week. Set up twitter specifically to tweet for the train company's help, as had read a few articles saying they were hot on customer complaints online. Someone on a night shift reached out within the hour and tracked my train (including a carriage split) and located the bag within eight hours and let me know at 1am. Totally saved my bacon."

THE BAD "I ordered new furniture after moving house in November and paid an additional fee to ensure delivery before Christmas. Although I knew the custom-build would take time, four weeks passed without any updates so I went on the company's website only to see that they'd closed for Christmas. I attempted to contact them but received no response – my family ended up eating Christmas dinner on the garden table . Once Christmas passed and they finally got back in touch, not only did the business not apologise, but they also charged us the pre-Christmas delivery fee. It certainly left a bad taste in the mouth!"

THE UGLY "I realised my internet bill was twice the agreed amount. After a series of long phone calls, they finally agreed they had made a mistake and would reduce the amount back down. When billing day came I was still charged the bigger amount – it was unacceptable so I decided I needed a new provider. What happened next? I got a text to say 'sorry you're leaving – could you give us feedback on why'. I was stunned – my feedback would have fallen on deaf ears as they clearly couldn't care less. Needless to say, I took to social media to warn others."

The one running theme for great customer service is showing that you appreciate that they are your customer. They have spent their hard-earned money with you, so the least you can do is care about them and their needs. This is especially true given that people have more avenues than ever before to place a complaint, with social media making complaints increasingly damaging.

1

Know your customers – One of the biggest mistakes businesses make is to start selling their products to everybody, without determining their target groups. It's the equivalent of shouting at a rock concert – nobody will hear you.

2

Focus your time on what works for your customers – Never do something just because everyone is doing it. Take time to discover the key activities that resonate with your customers and focus 80% of resources and energy on implementing them.

3

Reward and recognise customers – It is important to consider how to recognise your most valued customers more easily. Which are the customers with a track record of paying on time? Who are the loyal customers that are regularly in touch? Pull this information and produce a company process on recognising loyalty. If you can surprise and delight your regular customers, you will be on the way to producing true brand advocates.

Sales and Marketing



As successful SME leaders know, sales and marketing are intrinsically linked. After all, you can have the best products or services in the world – but if no one knows about you or your business, you're not going to get any business!

Marketing is essential for any company, no matter how big or small. Used well, it can help you greatly extend your reach and get targeted messages to wide and varied audiences. It works to deliver your business strategy, drive interest and most importantly supports the sales process.

But with so many channels available, including online and social media, it is

important to plan and to be very clear about what will work best for you. It's no use investing in a leaflet drop if all your customers are online, or taking out an advert in a publication that your customers don't read.

Marketing needn't cost the earth. You can manage some of the low-level activity yourself. Developing a social media presence doesn't require any investment apart from time, for example, and you may find that local press are receptive if you send them your own press release about something your business is doing.

The top three marketing channels for small businesses, when considering the investment needed compared to the potential impact, tend to be:



YOUR WEBSITE

It may sound obvious, but it's your shop window and maintaining it is key. Make sure it is search engine optimised to ensure your site gets the traffic it needs.



'OWNED' CHANNELS

Such as a blog and social media are both effective and good value. Tools such as LinkedIn can keep you connected to current and potential customers.



OFFLINE NETWORKING

Attending relevant events can be very beneficial. Remember, make friends not contacts to ensure you're remembered and always keep your word. If you commit to getting in touch by a certain date, do so.

Don't overlook marketing – a smart business is a marketing-led business. It will give you the opportunity to attract and present your best when initiating a sales call or meeting.

Skills and training

For an SME, its people are the most fundamental part of the business – including the owner themselves! Skills development matters on so many levels. On a business level, in an age where technological advancement is taking place at a rate of knots, upskilling or bringing in new skills, will help keep you competitive. It's a fact that larger companies are often able to invest more in skills development to stay ahead of the

game, so it's important for small businesses too. Being smaller can reap benefits – they can be flexible enough to offer skills and training when they are needed.

On a personal level, we are all likely to need to develop new skills at some point given that we are set to both live and work longer. Life expectancy could even get close to 100 before long – how can we prepare for that?



According to the World Economic Forum, over a third of skills that are considered important in today's workforce will have changed in just five years' time. Some of the key skills for the future, that businesses need to be thinking about today, are:



USING DATA

Investing time to analyse information will help you to identify ways to elevate your business to the next level



TECHNOLOGY

Embracing the technology and software that makes your business as efficient as possible



PEOPLE

Managing your people intelligently and sensitively

This isn't to forget traditional skills that also need honing, from servicing customer accounts to financial management.

Continuous learning nourishes our minds and is an indispensable tool for every career and organisation. It will help you and your colleagues acquire and maintain critical thinking skills and

find ways to relate to new circumstances and cultures.

Money spent on training sessions for staff is likely to be a good investment. But remember – don't forget yourself when creating a training plan. You need to keep your own skills development under review too.

Money talk

Many of us aren't comfortable talking about money. Not really. In the UK especially, it just 'isn't done' and many of us feel very awkward about it. This is particularly true when it comes to discussing difficult financial situations, where it seems like you've failed.

In business, this can pose a challenge; you might be passionate about what you sell but ultimately you do want to make a profit too. Talking money is pretty unavoidable for an SME and it's a vital area for a business owner to build resilience in as this affects your entire operation. How you tackle tough trading times can make or break your company.

There are many options available for funding, it's a minefield out there and can leave your head spinning. Death by choice is a popular phrase we hear from customers, who are bamboozled by the jargon and put off by pushy sales people.

A stigma also still exists in the minds of some business leaders that equates needing financial support to a weakness within the company. Some even see taking out a business loan as a last resort – this shouldn't be the case. Consider a mortgage for example. People wouldn't judge you for taking out a mortgage to get on the property ladder, so why should it be any different in business?

Savvy SMEs know that the cost of a loan can pale into insignificance when you look at the potential return on investment. In fact, those that come to us are far from struggling, they're often businesses who are hungry to do even better.





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**We'd love to hear
your thoughts**

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