AMAZON SELLER:

THE EPLAYBOOK TO BOOST SALES IN 2023

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Now that you have recognized the reality of the times and made some very tough decisions, it is important to create repetitive frameworks and processes tomake sure you set your organization up for long-term resilience. The first step is always the hardest, especially since much of this might be uncharted, but it gets easier with experience and time.

Many of the adjustments you are making to your business during this crisis are only as good as your upkeep and updating rituals. Just because you do something today does not mean you will do it forever. Likewise, a solution that is temporary should not be the sticks and glue that hold your business together for the long-term.

Technology

While there is a universe of items that fall under the category of technology, every single business without exception depends on software. It is therefore important that you focus on software that can automate your processes or amplify your communication between teams and customers.

Your customer support is directly tied to your team's ability to communicate internally. So, the first step to improving customer satisfaction is to make sure every single member of your own team is communicating quickly and effectively, with only a few hiccups.

If you are still sending word documents and spreadsheets to each other in emails, your business is moving too slow for this century let alone an economic crisis. Two technologies you should implement immediately are [Google Workspace](#) (formerly G Suite) or something similar, and [Slack](#) or [Microsoft Teams](#). If you do not have sufficient internal IT resources, many third party agencies are available to efficiently set these up for you.

Parallel to your internal communication, you have a big problem if you are still using a homebrew CRM, lack customer self-service, or are handling all customer requests via email and phone calls. You need to stop and take a hard look at how you can improve each customer interaction with the help of technology.

Customers want speed at first contact and speed in resolution. The technologies we recommend are [Facebook Messenger for Business](#), [Intercom](#), and [ZenDesk](#). If you are a larger organization with complex case flows, tons of help articles, and a dedicated customer support team larger than 10, we recommend [Salesforce Service Cloud](#).

Replacing an organisation's communications technologies can be an overwhelming exercise. But the best results come when the organization commits, picks a date to switch,

and moves full speed ahead knowing there will be kinks to figure out along the way. On the other hand, if you just try these technologies for months alongside the technologies you are currently using, buy-in will decline, and your team will likely come up with too many objections, all of which will cost you time and money. If you are rigorous about both the selection process

and the entire implementation timeline, you can solve problems or growing pains as they happen.

You may have already created a process to evaluate, price and negotiate a technology solution. If you do not have a process, you may want to consider Six Sigma HOQ (House of Quality). Many [trainers](#) and [educators](#) have written about its usage and application, and you do not need to be certified in Six Sigma to use it. Some of the tools presented in Six Sigma, like HOQ, actually work well in isolation from other frameworks you are using.

Here is a tip to choose new technology successfully: Organize demos from each of the organizations mentioned above and ensure your leadership team is present for them. Immediately after each demo, ask your head of IT or the best net promoter of that technology to continue the evaluation. Choose a date to reconvene to make a decision based on that evaluation. Make sure the leader assigned to the evaluation comes up with alternative recommendations if there are too many gaps, hurdles or implementation risks with the technology they have evaluated.

Leads/Funnels

It is possible that you have been historically dependent on leads that came in from a source that is no longer producing results because of recent events. Perhaps you are a restaurant and have counted on OpenTable or other reservation systems to drive traffic to your business. Or you have a digital business that started experiencing an ebb instead of a flow because one of

your partners stopped referring leads to you. Regardless of the reason for fewer leads, it is time to take matters into your own hands.

Direct customer acquisition is the best way to own the entire customer journey from start to finish though it can be costly if done incorrectly. To find a repeatable process to acquire your own customers, you will need to understand marketing funnels as well as marketing messaging. If you do not have that expertise in-house, find someone who does. These people typically are referred to as growth consultants, growth marketing firms, or online funnel marketing experts.

Never forget the hidden value within existing customers. Repeat purchase and re-engagement funnels are one of the best ways to start. These are often referred to as bottom-of-funnel customers. It is often much easier to learn from a Facebook or email marketing campaign to target your existing customers than it is to target a new cohort you have never engaged before. You can consider bundling your services, providing discounts on repeat purchases or even sending an email with existing testimonials to remind your customers why they chose you in the first place – aka your unique selling proposition. Here is a good [read](#) on improving your sales funnel tactics and strategies.

Webinars and virtual events are a great way to get the word out too. Once you have gotten a customer's attention, free trials and free services help build trust. A special promotion can close the deal but be mindful of steep discounts as they are not sustainable and may attract a lower quality customer than you had intended to target.

Content Engine

This is without a doubt one of your most important forms of automation for inbound leads and customer retention. Content is not just a means to increase organic traffic, aka SEO. It is also an organization's digital footprint to guide a customer through the journey. Remember, your company is a product, and your content strategy is a way to inform, educate, guide and win customers for life and it works even while you sleep.

Content comes in many forms, shapes and sizes. Anything from a Tweet to an hour-long video is considered content. If you are a restaurant, your menu and recipes are primary forms of content. Customers can feel your brand and culture through your content. That is why there is an art and science behind the way content is created.

As a service company, your content provides a foundation of past successes, typically in the form of customer case studies and testimonials. While one piece of content might not influence a potential customer to buy right away, it becomes a critical touchpoint that reduces friction, eliminates objections and creates a desire within them to contact you.

If you are an ecommerce company, everything you do relies on your content strategy. When you post a new product, the way you craft the product description and your social media posts, the kind of photographs you publish, as well as product reviews, are all incredibly powerful ways to get a customer to purchase.

There are some great reads on content strategy. Among them we recommend *Content Strategy for the Web* by Kristina

Halvorson and *Content that Converts* by Laura Hanly. If you would like to start off with free resources, check out Neil Patel's [blog](#).

Tracking

As the saying goes, what gets measured gets done. In the context of business, this means that systematically monitoring measurements will keep you on track with your goals because that knowledge will help you tweak your plans to get better results. Before you start any new marketing or customer acquisition strategy you should therefore know what you are going to measure: the key performance indicators. If you are about to try Facebook marketing for the first time, for instance, you need to select the ultimate success metric as well as the feeder metrics that will send you signals along the way. Oftentimes, marketers choose metrics that are easily available or visible on the marketing platform, such as ROAS (return on advertising spend). Be careful as these metrics typically are missing something critical, such as returns, repeat purchase value by cohort or even profit margin.

As a leader, you need to figure out what is important to the health of the entire company. There is no KPI-by-committee approach here. At the same time, you should be confident that each department leader is familiar with their own areas and

knows what to measure. These metrics should be tracked in a separate scorecard. Certain tools help you to keep a record of your KPIs, but a spreadsheet will work fine to start with.

Ask your leadership team to each select one metric, just one, that reflects the health of a division, department or business line. This metric should convey growth or decline for a short period of time (week or month), success or challenges, and must be understood by all. It might take them weeks, even months to figure out their metric. This exercise is phenomenal in that it really provides permission for a leader to go learn more about their department in a way they may have previously been uncomfortable doing. They may pick a vanity metric that stays constant, in which case you will know they picked the wrong met- ric. Ask them to select a new metric that fluctuates weekly, even daily. Once they provide that, ask them why it moved. Initially, be prepared for them to tell you that they need to check with the team. Over time, that leader will learn there are metrics too volatile or too constant for executive reporting. Through this learning, they will ultimately find the right one.

Reduction of Offerings

It may seem counterintuitive at first to reduce your total offerings. But as the saying goes, less is more. In this case, do more with less. Many businesses, including Fortune 500 companies, have spent a lot of effort and money over the past few years trying to be all

things to all people. But the pandemic and related economic disruption has caused a crush on resources and supply chains. It has changed customer behavior, putting it in a state of flux and unpredictability, and is likely to cause future uncertainty.

In response, many companies have started rethinking their old strategy of being all things to all people, deciding to reduce their offerings instead. They are questioning the concept of providing customers with vast choices, which are associated with crushing costs and overburdened facilities for the organization. Indeed, by summer 2020, the average number of different items sold at supermarkets was down by 7.3% according to market research firm Nielsen . The amount of variety in certain segments of products, such as baby care, dropped by as much as 30%.

You can reduce the total burden on your staff and yourself by making an informed decision to eliminate or reduce products, services, offerings or even the markets to which you cater.

To achieve this, you need to take a look at your data. If you do not have the luxury of slicing and dicing comprehensive performance data real-time in a reporting tool, you are not alone. Many small to medium sized organizations lack the data warehousing and data analytics strategies that they read (and dream) about.

The starting solution is simple: ask your finance, data or marketing teams to export data related to the past 6-12 months of revenue in line-item form. Make sure it includes customer segments such as geography, industry and number of employees, as well as revenue details such as product/service, revenue and profitability. Do not worry about duplicates. You want to see every purchase, whether it was new or a repeat. This gives you a detailed spreadsheet that you can manipulate to tell you what is really going on.

Start by asking a few questions:

Which orders are your largest? Smallest?

How many customers make a repeat purchase?

Is there a pattern to your highest profit orders? Geography? Industry? Customer size?

You can overlay other data on top of this, such as implementation/delivery time and refunds. If you notice that your largest orders have a higher refund rate, ask your team why. If you find your smallest orders to take the most time to deliver, ask your team why. If you see a particular month with higher revenue, perhaps for a certain customer segment or offering, ask your team what promotions or advertisements were run during this time. If you have offerings that are not core to your business model, ask your sales team why these

are being sold. This will begin a process that you should perform at least twice a year to analyze your revenue streams.

You will want to take a look at the lowest revenue and lowest profit items and start cutting those out. Your leadership team might have some ideas on why you should preserve those items, but there is a right time to do that. And that time is not during a pandemic when cost control measures are required. If there are brand new offerings that are just starting to ramp up, you can consider them to be market tests, but do remember that they could be huge distractions to your core business. If there is an entire revenue stream that costs more to maintain than the actual net profit it generates, you should understand why along with the team that enables and services that revenue stream.

Now that your spreadsheet is generating the right questions, consider automating the data collection and reporting so that it is no longer a manual process. Many great tools do this, including [Google Data Studio](), [Domo](), [Baremetrics](), [Tableau](), and [KissMetrics]() to name just a few. The best solutions allow you to export the data to an Excel/Spreadsheet for further analysis.

Supply Chain

The supply chain requires special attention because it can make or break many small businesses, especially in the United States. It is of particular concern now because nothing has had an impact on global supply chains more exhaustively than the Covid-19 pandemic.

If you produce your own products in-house, you are following local and federal guidelines for the health and safety of your employees. If you were importing products from other countries, not only are you following local and federal guidelines, you are also at the mercy of customs regulations, temporary trade restrictions, and the scrutiny of the source or origin of your products by your customers.

You can make micro-adjustments now. Alternatively, you can also jump straight onto the path of complete transformation. Its impact on your revenue will ultimately drive your decision. Continuing to depend on lean manufacturing processes will create shortages and delays in production, and riding price increases for raw goods and third party enablement can prove to be catastrophic within months. The good news is that preparing now will help you become resilient to future challenges. This is your wake up call.

The first step is direct supplier risk mapping and identification. You will want to create a list, more

so a spreadsheet, of all your direct suppliers. Make sure you include annual dollars spent with

each supplier, as well as the expected delays you are experiencing. If you only have a single supplier for a major component or product offering, a diversification strategy is the most common way to create a resilient process for the future. Ask yourself, are there other suppliers that aren't experiencing delays? Are there local suppliers? Can I produce this component myself? Reducing dependency on a single supplier, however, is easier said than done. While it may require a lot of time communicating with potential suppliers, you may end up finding a better supplier along the way.

Second, and this is likely a parallel path, find a way to produce without that component. This may involve a redesign, reengineering or selecting a completely different alternative. For example, if you need a special battery that you used to buy in bulk from China, you may consider redesigning to a standard battery size so you can source more quickly. While that is a simple example, the key takeaway is reducing your dependence on a part, supplier, or offshore vendor whose consignment to you might be constricted by regulations and trade restrictions.

Third, many companies are exploring a regional strategy for production. You may have had contact in the past with suppliers who were geographically close but you rejected them because they had a slightly longer production cycle. Now is the time to bring out your "rolodex" and get in touch with them.

Longer term, you do not want to cut out suppliers who are under temporary restrictions. In other words, do not close the door on a supplier in China that you have worked with successfully for years. In fact, you may be able to find a way for them to deliver in the interim, using lower capacity ports and shipping strategies. One US business relied completely on a manufacturer in China. When the US-China trade war broke out in 2018, their interim solution was to re-route shipments to the US via Singapore.

Fourth, ask your suppliers if they have other locations they have spun up, or are planning to spin up. These manufacturers may have secondary locations in other countries, and some are even willing to work with you to create a location closer to your headquarters. As an example, many automakers are migrating production to Mexico or South Carolina to reduce the delivery time and overall reliance on a single manufacturing geography, which can create potential bottlenecks and supply failures.

Finally, make sure you are informed of federal and local government regulations weekly, if not daily, along with potential avenues for speeding up your access to

components and raw materials. The World Health Organization (WHO), for example, has a [process](#) to request critical supply chain items if your business qualifies.

Formalize and Document Processes

Tough times and major economic disruptions mean uncertainty. As we have discussed, uncertainty equals a lack of safety. And that, in conjunction with all of the steps you have to take to secure your business (such as restructuring), may well mean departures, which include those of highly valuable employees.

This is one of a number of reasons that process documentation and paired learning have become even more important now. If you have proper, updated practices and protocols manuals, and a document repository of critical job functions for key areas alongside knowledge transfer touchpoints, you will eliminate most of the pain that comes with being reliant on individuals at a time of employee departures.

One way to accomplish this is through job elevation. When speaking with a high performer, you should let them know they need to offload their critical or time-consuming work in order to elevate their position beyond what it is today. Create a short-term goal for them to document and train at least one other person in your organization to do that work. Give that new person time to perform the actions on their own, to be reviewed by the star performer. Success is measured by the new employee's abilities to autonomously carry out those processes without help. Rinse and repeat in other areas, with other duties,

or even ask the new trainee to train another employee as a backup.

Another way to decrease your dependence on people is through software. Once you start paying attention to this, you will be surprised to find how many roles in your organization involve highly-repetitive tasks that have a software solution. After conducting an inventory of such tasks through your leadership team, you can price out options, set a timeline and budget, and begin implementation. It is crucial that you study the effects of software solutions on processes, departments, and even the entire organization to ensure that you have a handle on any unintended consequences.

Finally, you should start talking with consulting firms as a contingency plan for your key operations. If you have a team of 20 people performing customer support, start looking at an outsourced model to handle just 5%-10% of your customer contacts. Measure their performance against that of your internal team, and use that to continuously make them improve their performance. If the opportunity arises, you now have a backup for your internal support team, likely at a lower cost.

Make sure you maintain good contact with the outsourced provider, and understand their ramp up and training time for increasing the number of contacts they take. Also, if possible, do not switch completely to a single outsourced provider. If you have the time, creating competition between a couple of different providers will give you leverage for negotiations down the road. You will also be able to compare performance against your internal baseline as well as between the two external providers.

Leadership

The people you count on every day are also counting on you for their pay check. Jeopardize this one thing and loyalty, dedication, performance and commitment will all take a back seat to the individual's priorities.

So how do you incentivize, motivate and lead through this challenging time while retaining your key executive team?

There are books, videos and entire curriculums focused around this topic. But the truth is that all of those efforts take a year or more to bear fruit. The real question is how to adjust immediately. It is possible. But do remember that these adjustments are only a way for you to buy time for the longer-term strategies that we will cover later in this document.

Adjustment 1: Remind your leadership of your organization's meaning

As Guy Kawasaki, author of [Art of the Start](#) says: [Make meaning](#). Your business started and is still in existence because it has a purpose. Beyond the prestige, money and notoriety, there sits a larger-than-life meaning behind what you are doing. Your leadership team needs to be reminded of this meaning every week during this tough time. It should be engrained in your culture and in all that you do.

While there are solid examples of meaning for some of the largest companies, there is little in terms of small business meaning. So here are a few examples to provide inspiration:

Restaurant

Feeding the world during a time of need.

Donating thousands of bread loaves each month to end hunger. Free family meals for the recently unemployed.

Salon

Helping people feel good during a challenging time. Free haircuts for kids and senior citizens.

Ending Covid hair for good.

eCommerce

Buy a pair of shoes, we give a pair to someone in need. Earth's most customer-centric company.

Help people save money so they can live better.

Software

A computer on every desk and in every home.

Organize the world's information and make it universally accessible. Bring the world closer together.

You may notice some of these are philanthropic, some cultural, and some read as mission statements. Just saying it is not enough. Once you come up with yours, you need to live it and tie it back to your business every single day.

Adjustment 2: Autonomy to help solve problems

Just running around barking orders is a recipe for stifling creativity and job satisfaction. You are paying your leadership big bucks, and you need to trust them to help solve problems. If you lack confidence in your team, get a new team. At the end of the day, you will not realize the true potential of every leader unless you create an environment open to autonomy and accepting of failure. After all, these two go hand-in-hand.

Autonomy does not mean that everyone has the freedom to do what they want. You need controls and measurements to tie everything back to the business. The controls and measurements are also there to prevent micromanaging.

There will always be a few bad apples who substitute their unilateral ideas over the goals that the leadership team created. On top of that, typically they will not tell you until they miss the goals. How do you know who they are? Simple. If you have a leader who does not promote autonomy the way you intended, you will have a dissatisfied team, non-performing leader and missed organization goals.

Adjustment 3: Communicate, communicate, communicate

Leaving employees to their own devices – even the leadership – to make sense of what is happening during an economic crisis will only lead to false conclusions and rumors. As a senior leader, owner or CEO of the organization, you now need more touchpoints to communicate than ever before.

If you had a quarterly all-hands meeting, move it to monthly. If you do bi-weekly one-on- ones, consider holding them weekly. If you have a monthly employee or customer newsletter, consider making it weekly. Share the good, bad and key projects. This allows you to frame the issues and provide explanations from your point of view before rumors run rampant. Your job profile now includes motivator, cheerleader and life coach who inspires everyone in your company to be and do better.

Customers

An organization's ability to attract and retain customers during this extraordinary time is key to its survival. Sitting back and waiting for times to improve will only result in your business suffering and even shutting down. There are a few areas to take into consideration: Retention, Acquisition and Expansion.

Retention

Simply put, customer retention is one of the key differentiators between businesses that continue to grow and flourish and those that do not. Being able to retain and continue selling to your existing customers is the best way to ensure that you achieve your business goals. Yet, many businesses are uniquely focused on – and base their definition of growth on – their ability to obtain new customers. This, even though selling to an existing customer is many times cheaper than obtaining a new one. [Studies have shown](#) that while selling to a new customer has a success rate of only 5% to 20%, the success rate of selling to an existing customer is 60% to 70%.

Retention is quite simply the sum of all activities that enable you to keep much of the revenue that you have created. In SaaS companies, this is oftentimes called MRR (monthly recurring revenue) or ARR (annual recurring revenue). For an ecommerce company, this is oftentimes referred to as GMV (gross merchandising volume). Most companies just call this recurring revenue or revenue.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that your customers will stick with you just because you have a great product. That is rarely the case. Customer retention is something that you need to strategize and plan around. Additionally, you need to capitalize on your existing customers by continuously creating upsell opportunities that bring significant value to your customers.

Focusing on your existing customers also takes fewer marketing dollars while increasing your profit margin, as selling to new customers is much more price-focused than selling to existing ones. It will also provide you with the opportunity to hear feedback on your product line so that you can identify areas where there is a need for improvement.

At the same time, your retention strategy should be focused on dollars, not units or customers. It is a common mistake to count orders or total number of customers, but not every customer is created equal and there are different values for each cohort of customers. Previously, we discussed how to report and analyze this information. Now, you will put it to use.

Make sure that you not only have a customer relationship management (CRM) tool, but that you get everything you can out of it. CRM is the process of knowing your customers, who they are, where they are, how they shop, what is important to them, who is marketing to them, etc. You need to accumulate as much relevant information about your customers as possible in order to be able to properly serve them and market to them.

Proper use of your CRM tool will allow you to target your customers with offers that are attractive to them, increasing both your conversion rate and customer satisfaction at the same time. Also, you can not only personalize your follow-up contacts, but also ensure that you deliver on any promises made.

You may have noticed one thing about the companies you shop from: The more personalised the service and the more timely the delivery of promises, the happier you are as a customer and the more likely you are to not only stay with them, but to buy other products from them. The same goes for your customers.

Developing an anti-churn strategy is another key initiative for dealing with the pandemic or any disruption. Use your CRM to pick up signs of churn and to implement tools to head it off, thereby reducing actual churn. For example, you should set up an automated alarm system that alerts you and your teams to factors that signal churn. This may include picking up a reduction in activity or engagement by certain customers, allowing you the chance to get involved before customers are completely disengaged.

The pandemic and other major disruptions produce entirely new motives for customer churn

and, in turn, bring with them entirely new opportunities. This is also a perfect moment to show your empathy. You want to rise to the occasion and address your customers' needs by providing timely products or features to help them with the issues they are facing. This may be as simple as recognizing that everyone is living through tough financial times and creating more flexible payment terms.

Reward Loyalty

You do not want to just have a "squeaky wheel" strategy by just focusing on your churning customers. While your customer

retention strategy, by definition, needs to focus on customers who are at risk of churning, it also should be geared to reward customers who are faithfully staying with you. A customer loyalty program can reward these customers. Such programs provide them with an incentive to increase shopping with you – the more they shop, the more they are rewarded.

Customer loyalty is basically the willingness of your customer to engage with you, usually in the context of repeated purchases. It can manifest in a number of ways. Among them:

1. Supporting your entire product line, including being willing to try out new offerings that are relatively or entirely untested;

2. Allowing you a second chance even when they have had a disappointing experience with your product;

3. Making you their starting point when they are shopping for something that that you offer;

4. Becoming advocates for your offerings either directly with family and friends by providing positive reviews, or otherwise engaging in social media.

These are all incredibly important factors both in terms of repeat sales and for new client acquisition, and they come at hugely lower cost than other forms of customer acquisition. New prospects, for instance, are a lot more likely to listen to their family and friends than they are to trust your marketing efforts. Additionally, customer retention leads to higher revenue and profit margins, meaning that each percent increase in retention yields much more correspondingly in revenues. This is why it is crucial that you have a robust program for rewarding and nurturing loyal relationships. There is no better time than now to

start if you do not already have a loyalty program. And if you do, it is the perfect time to beef it up.

If you are looking for more in-depth analysis of customer loyalty and how to develop programs, you might want to check out Fredrick F Reichfeld's *The Loyalty Effect* .

Cost-Effective Customer Retention

We have discussed using your newsletter for transparency and communication and even increasing the frequency at which you send it. Keep in mind that your company newsletter is one of the simplest and most cost-effective ways of retaining your customers. At the very least, it reminds your customers of your brand whenever they open their mail.

Another trend that has received a boost by the pandemic is customers' desire for convenience and customization. You have probably noticed businesses – from those you shop to your competitors – making changes to respond to this. Some easy examples are many tools that have been implemented to allow customers the complete ability to customize, order, and pay for food items in app, whether it's coffee, a meal, or ice cream. These are both convenient and address safety concerns at the same time.

As part of your customer loyalty program, you should consider adding a referral program. Encourage customers to make referrals by offering them discounts on future purchases or other incentives that best fit your business. If properly constructed, this will increase customer acquisition as well as sales from your current customers. Concurrently, it will increase your customer

satisfaction. The key is to concentrate on powerful and fun incentives in order to get your customers invested in your brand and to become advocates for it.

Second to your customer service programs, you must always focus on what you can do for each customer to make them feel like they are your only customer. It is surprising how many companies do not have a Covid relief program, or think that there is nothing they can do to help struggling customers. While these programs could be specific to your customers, they could also work hand in hand with any social responsibility programs that you implement.

Your customers are very sensitive to everything your business does – what it buys, sells, or advertises to its entire audience. You need to make sure that your business does as it says and that there are no inconsistencies between the two. It is important that your relationship with your customers goes beyond just products and services. Make sure you think of your customers' core values and create programs that allow you to get involved with them in their communities or with their personal goals. All this will help you cement deeper relationships with them.

Not only will you need to think through your own aid and assistance programs, but you also must create a regular communication cadence and strategy to ensure that every customer is aware of what you are offering them during this tough time. The act of simply

providing a discount or putting a customer on-hold provides them with the confidence and

loyalty to come back as a stronger customer when the time is right.

Acquisition

Customer acquisition is the process of bringing new customers to your business. Being able to systematically keep adding new customers to your customer base (where they will go into your customer retention strategy and plan) is one of the main ways of growing your business.

At the same time, acquisition is not necessarily what you think it means. Keep in mind that net new customer acquisition is a risky maneuver during a crisis. However, you should look at your marketing and sales performance data and isolate a few cohorts that have always delivered great results – and revenue – for further testing. For example, if you historically have relied on Google Ads to attract customers, you are missing out big on other sources of acquisition such as social media, performance marketing and grassroots outreach.

You should also focus on selling new services and offerings to existing customers, which, depending on your offering and positioning, could be considered expansion. Expansion is one of the most overlooked, and oftentimes the scariest of all revenue retention and increase strategies. Organizations are generally fearful of increasing prices and upselling to existing customers.

First, identify customers who are not on contract or have zero commitment. By locking them into a contract or recurring service (aka subscription), you will effectively retain that revenue for the duration of the contract. While you are looking at contracts and

subscriptions, take a look at your pricing as compared to the market's. One great resource to help you with the exercise is [Price Intelligently](#). They discuss price sensitivity, elasticity and the market forces that will drive how customers will respond to your price change.

Second, take a look at your marketing and sales team structures along with incentives and commission packages. It is important to ensure that your teams are incentivized for expansion in excess of your baseline revenue. The models that work the most effectively are the ones that everyone understands and that do not dig into your targeted profit margin significantly. If you are paying 10% of revenue to the sales team, for instance, and only have a 15% profit margin, the math simply will not allow you to stay in business.

Third, and this is critical, your support team is the starting point to customer retention. They are not the only team that helps here. Customers will want to escalate issues and

talk to someone about pricing in more detail. Trying to train each of your customer support representatives to help each customer with technical, operational and billing issues will lead to long training cycles. Carving out a small team that sits between your customer support and billing teams will result in the best performance. Call it Customer Retention, Customer Happiness or Customer Guru. Whatever works for you. The name does not matter as much as the goals for this team, which is to expand revenue through retention activities.

Customer Focus Is Key

Regardless of how you approach it, customer focus is without question one of the most important traits of small businesses that have historically demonstrated consistent growth. As much as the pandemic has caused sudden and vast changes in the business landscape, this one principle has held true. The businesses that have shown growth during the pandemic are those that have taken actions to improve interactions and their overall rela- tionships with their customers. As part of these steps are programs that help customers, offering them more flexibility such as easier return policies and payment options.

There are customer-centric programs you can put together, most of which have been written about in books such as *The Effortless Experience* by Matthew Dixon, or the *Simple Truths of Service* by Ken Blanchard, and *The Thank You Economy* by Gary Vaynerchuk. An oversimplified key takeaway from all of these resources is to treat each customer like they are family and you will build customers for life.

Partnerships

The manner in which you engage new and existing partners is a key to unlocking automated growth for your business. A partner can be a vendor, contractor, distributor, retailer or supplier. You should always be looking for complementary partners as well as for ways to leverage existing partners for co-marketing. Once you establish this ecosystem of reciprocity, you will never look at marketing in the same linear light. When you work with partners

to market to the same target customers, you reduce your total acquisition cost by leveraging existing marketing funnels that both sides have established.

Quite simply, creating a partner ecosystem with a partner program will boost revenue in ways that the typical SMB marketing strategy cannot touch. Once you have found a way to leverage partnerships to scale your acquisition, you will wonder why you never did this

before. Sharing marketing funnels and leveraging each other's existing customer network is one of the fastest ways to grow business.

Briefly, a partner program can be defined as: "a *strategy* to motivate and engage channel partners to create more value for *customers*".

[Partner programs](#) are so successful that thousands of companies use them including some really big names such as [Microsoft](#), [VMWare](#), [Oracle](#), [eBay](#), [Mailchimp](#), [Shopify](#) and [Citrix](#).

But despite the potential for huge success, [creating successful partner programs](#) isn't a piece of cake. It takes time, effort, and most importantly, strategic planning. Before you consider creating your own, you must remember that:

- Channel partner programs are an extremely rewarding way to expand into new markets…. but only if you have a mature product or solution.

- Creating a channel partner program is a big investment of time, effort, and resources and the

results will not show till at least a year later. This is why your partner program must be aligned with the company strategy and business goals and you must have executive support before you kick-off the process.

A well-designed channel partner program will *always* deliver value to the end customer. In fact, the best channel partners and the most successful are those who look at your customers as their customers too.

The success of a partnership and channel sales lies in the value each party gets out of it. So who you partner with largely depends on what value you are building for your customers. Once you know that, you will need to identify and define the type of partners that may be relevant to your business and choose the best among them.

Do remember that a partner is any company or organization that can help you deliver more value to your customers. Here are a few examples of partners:

- **Tech integration partners:** You give these partners a platform to create new features and functions for your end customers. The incentive for them is your existing customer base. The App stores run by Apple and Google are a good example of this. Both tech giants have an operating system and allow developers to create new apps for their platforms. These apps deliver a lot of value (and joy) to Apple's and Google's end customers.

- **Channel resellers:** The ideal reseller helps you roll out your product or service in a location you are not familiar with, such as another country. These partners

understand local laws, regulations and culture and help you ensure that your product or solution makes a smooth entry into the market and gradually establishes itself. The advantage of having local partners is that they are seen as trustworthy by your end customers. You cannot evoke that level of trust because you do not have a presence in that market yet.

- **System integrators:** These partners build more value by combining your product or service with other solutions. This could be complex solutions such as those designed for the Internet of Things, where different companies combine different technologies and operating networks to build better products and solutions for their common customers.

Sometimes businesses have hundreds of channel partners. A well-structured strategy ensures that everyone is on the same page and is working in exactly the same way to create value for the end customer.

Typically, businesses create several resources and put in place incentives to attract and motivate their channel partners. These include the obvious ones such as a revenue-sharing arrangements as well as the following:

- **Amazing sales and marketing tools:** Your partners are given top-notch professional sales tools to take to your end customer. Ensure that these tools are as good as the tools you give your internal sales team. Read more about channel sales processes and sales tools in this detailed guide: *How to Design a Sales Process for B2B Sales.*

- **Education and training programs:** Education programs where your partners can learn valuable practical skills are extremely rewarding in the long run. But they require considerable effort to create. So if you are taking the trouble to design them, ensure you do it well.

- **Certifications:** Software and hardware solutions that require the partner to get involved with implementation and maintenance can be a risk for your business if they do not work well, and can also create problems for future sales. To prevent this from happening, ensure that your channel partners completely understand your product or solution and are well equipped to troubleshoot. You could motivate your channel partners in this regard by creating hardware and software certification programs that they can participate in. The partner views certification programs as an investment in their growth. This motivates them to work more on your specific solutions.

- **Excellent sales support:** When your internal sales team has problems of any kind, they easily get in touch with developers, engineers or other colleagues in your organization to help them solve these problems. Any good channel partner program will ensure your channel partners have the same easy access to your qualified staff.

- **Lead platform:** In some channel partner programs, you distribute leads to partners to keep them engaged and interested. This can be done in many different ways depending on the set up. You could have excel sheets, emails or an internal messaging service to send leads out. No matter what system you use, make sure you follow up on these leads with your partners.

- **Events:** Getting all your partners together at an event is a good way to educate and motivate them. At such platforms, partners can exchange ideas and have insightful discussions, which are valuable for the sales process.

Your partner program will have some or all of these elements or even more. It all depends on your resources and goals.

Whatever you do, to build a successful partner program, get these four core elements right:

1. **Motivation of channel partners:** Many companies overlook this very important point. Their reasoning is that partners should be motivated enough by the revenue-sharing arrangements they have with them. But this is a short-sighted view that ignores the fact that channel partners are essentially your extended sales team and that you should invest the same amount of energy into motivating them as you do your own internal team. Besides revenue, motivators include those mentioned above such as education programs, top notch sales tools, leads, certifications, strong sales support, and collaboration to build new and improved solutions for the end customer.

2. **Clear and direct communication:** This element determines whether your partner program will succeed or fail. Clear and consistent communication enables your channel partners to understand your solution and your end customer's requirements completely even if you do not meet or speak to your partners every day. One of the most important things you can do on this front is to ensure that all the

information about your company and your solution in sales training tools, brochures, and presentations is extremely clear with no room for interpretation. The message in all of these resources must be consistent.

3. **Tools to close sales deals:** A good sales experience leads to better customer loyalty and more sales. Make sure that you create spectacular sales tools such as presentations, articles, documents and videos that your channel partners can use to close deals and deliver more value to your end customers. Some examples of sales tools for partners include pre-written emails or email templates, sales presentations, product demos, customer profile and buyer persona guide, competitor information and customer references. All this takes a massive amount of effort to create, but it always pays off in the long run.

4. **Remove blockers:** To ensure that your partner program is successful you must remove any roadblocks that complicate the relationship between you and your partner. Examples of blockers include long or egocentric agreements, low quality sales material, slow communication, low-quality education programs that make it difficult for your partners to understand the ins and outs of your product/solution, which subsequently makes it difficult for them to sell it.

Workforce

The Covid-19 pandemic has introduced an additional wrinkle in human resources. Businesses from virtually all industries have had to make changes to their workplaces and working arrangements altogether. Some of those changes are temporary, and things have either already reverted to normal or will in the near term. However, the pandemic has brought with it significant changes that are going to be with us either long-term or permanently. One of them is remote working.

Over the past quarter century, there has been a great deal of advancement toward remote working. In many organizations, however, remote working has always been viewed as a supplement to the work done in the office. For instance, office workers have been allowed to telecommute during times they have been unable to come into the office for whatever reason. Smartphones have contributed to this trend, increasingly acting as digital leashes for workers who are now connected to work even outside office hours. All this has arguably been to the benefit of both employer and employee.

Many companies have also used remote technology to hire the best talent from across the globe or to set up offices in various global locations.

The Covid-19 pandemic has not only greatly accelerated these trends, it has changed the dynamic entirely. Specifically, due to government and health restrictions, companies have had to allow entire units – and in many cases their entire workforce – to work remotely. In a significant number of cases, all contact between employees has become virtual.

Regardless of how the pandemic proceeds, it will have a longstanding impact on the workplace. Working from home will continue to be an option for employees in many industries. As we go forward, some businesses and industries may choose to make parts or all of their workforce work from home permanently.

Companies and their leadership will therefore need to take certain steps to ensure productivity and increase morale in the remote work environment.

Remote working also brings with it increased and different data security and privacy concerns, which businesses will need to address too.

All these factors will necessitate the acceleration of cloud and remote working infrastructure along with other business continuity software.

Safety and Efficiency

One of the main topics of conversation amid the concern for the safety of the workforce during the pandemic has been the requirement for in-person meetings, conferences, and associated travel. Needless to say, businesses have significantly dialled back on in-person meetings over the past year. Initially, large scale events and conferences were either postponed or

cancelled as a short-term measure. However, as time has gone by, there is a growing reali- sation that cancelations and postponements need to be replaced by adjustments.

If your business has continued to hope for a return to the old normal, the time has come to divest yourself of those thoughts. Regardless of which direction the pandemic goes, or how effective the various vaccines are, or how widely they end up being administered, the world has changed in many respects, among them, how people meet.

Many will of you will concede that conducting meetings, events, and conferences remotely brings with it efficiencies. For instance, it reduces the time it takes from your employees and also costs that come with business travel, even if that travel is done locally. Having said that, there are important benefits to in-person meetings and events.

Whatever it is, the time has to come to balance all of these needs and to adjust for the changing times with regard to safety, efficiency and business needs. Regardless of where you and your business are placed at the moment, you must invest in plans and available technology to allow your workforce to function and grow during and as a result of this disruption.

Create a Business Continuity Plan

If you have not already done so, this is a perfect opportunity to create a business continuity plan.

For this, you need to take four immediate steps:

1. Create a team that is representative of your entire workforce to ensure that any practices and protocols you plan to implement are viewed from all angles;

2. Build the business continuity plan incorporating the input of your cross-functional team;

3. Ensure that your employees and customers are protected;

4. Implement a communication plan demonstrating your leadership.

Create a Team to Assess Risk

Your team should be made up of leaders from various departments and business units to ensure that (1) All of the associated risks are identified; and (2) All risks are assessed from every angle.

After you have created your team, you should obtain their inputs on a variety of topics. The team should assess the effect on sales if business travel decreases or ceases, or if the shifting priorities of customers or other economic factors lead to a

slowdown in demand. What about the changing landscape of markets and supply chains? How do sales delays impact your working capital? What about contractual penalties or lost rebates due to a change in demand? All these scenarios must be discussed.

The team should provide inputs on the impact on productivity if employees are sick, or if there is concern over the spread of the virus within your employee groups in situations where remote work cannot be implemented or is not feasible. Conversely, what are the expenses associated with healthcare outlays, and remote collaboration tools and protocols?

Additionally, there should be an assessment of whether there are potential delays in implementing strategic initiatives and plans. Are there new products that are slated to be launched? How will those be affected? Do the same with partnerships.

Build a Plan

Most businesses have some business continuity plan to address natural disasters, power interruptions, or cyber-attacks. These plans provide the company with a protocol to protect its data and essentials, and to get systems back online and functional. A business continuity plan to address any other disruption should follow the same playbook. The business must identify the risks, prioritize and order mitigation, and assign different portions of responsibility to appropriate leaders.

In terms of hiring and retention, you should concentrate on any measures to address employee protection and containment.

These measures will usually differ significantly from department to department and job to job. Also reconsider the pace of your hiring and recruiting both in terms of the effect on your safety measures and the rapidly changing economic landscape.

Another crucial area relates to cultural interaction norms and changes engendered by the pandemic. Keep in mind that norms exist across a spectrum. They are not exactly the same across all your employees. Therefore, be prepared to adopt a plan that addresses the spectrum rather than any specific norm that you personally believe is appropriate.

On the operational side, begin with planned tech investments in collaboration tools. If these plans were made without sufficient consideration of the realities of Covid, carefully assess them again. Additionally, take a look at your business units and departments. Create a cross-training plan in order to weather absenteeism and changes in remote work practices. You should also take a careful look at your office space and decide what is needed both in the short and long-term. The issues relevant to capital, such as negotiating with your landlord, are covered separately under the "Capital" section of this e-book.

Next, you need to move on to your top and bottom lines. What expansion plans did you have in place for the upcoming 6, 12, or 18 months? What about your strategic initiatives? Those need to be analyzed in light of the current climate. You should take a careful look at the capital expenditures that you were planning that have not been incurred yet. Also, are there adjustments you need to make to your working capital?

Ensure Safety

In any crisis, particularly a health one, individuals react across a spectrum. This spectrum also drives their social interaction norms. At the extremes, there is overreaction and underreaction. This is a bit of a Goldilocks situation for you as a leader because your challenge is to react "just right". And when you are dealing with a health concern, particularly a virus as in the case of Covid, "just right" is not as easy as it may initially sound.

When it comes to health concerns, it is likely best to err on the side of caution. Additionally, it is crucial that you are transparent with employees and customers. Identify and implement personal and professional safety measures.

The personal safety measures are ones that are implemented both at work and suggested for implementation otherwise as well. These are things like wearing a facemask, refraining from touching your face with your bare hands to the extent possible, carrying and using hand sanitizers and so on.

Professional safety measures should be adopted and implemented at work. These include limiting the size of gatherings and meetings at the office, providing and requiring the use of sanitizers and facemasks at gathering spaces, replacing handshakes with other forms of greeting, and protocols to identify symptoms so that employees can be asked to refrain from coming to the office if they show any of them, etc.

In addition to ensuring that your employees and customers are safe, these measures have added business benefits. Employees are much more likely to show up for work if they know that (1) Their employer is concerned and has implemented measures to protect them; (2) Their employer is being transparent and realistic about the situation; and (3) their work does not present unreasonable risk to the health and safety of their families.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Communication is always important. It is especially important when it comes to major disruptions, particularly health ones such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Your employees will look to you for information and transparency. They will also expect you to have a plan that can guide them and their behavior. Therefore, you have to get ahead of the crisis, make decisions, and implement them in order to help move your employees and your business forward.

Your decisions and actions must be effectively communicated. This requires a proper and comprehensive communication plan that identifies the challenges you face and outlines the actions you and your business are taking as well as those that your team needs to take. You need to continually be empathetic to the plight of your employees, especially those affected by the pandemic.

The communication must come from the top of the organization and be transmitted to ensure that it reaches the intended audience effectively. It must resonate with them. The communication may be in the form of an email, a live teleconference, or other effective forms of communication. Keep

in mind that the communication must be updated, repeated, and transmitted regularly.

It is also crucial that the leadership, particularly the president or CEO, be visible and available. Employees must be able to ask questions and to have their concerns addressed. This may require you to do more than just allowing questions at a meeting. You may have to set up a process where employees can air issues while staying anonymous. You could even create a hotline for such issues.

Creating and Managing a Remote Workforce

Before the pandemic, businesses had largely stuck to the concept of having employees report to offices while recognising that technology had made it possible for them to also have a remote workforce comprised of those who needed to work remotely for a variety of reasons, or those whose work did not really need them to come into office every day.

Covid has completely changed this. Employee expectations and government-mandated requirements to ensure that employees can work in safe conditions have incentivized businesses to substantially increase their remote working capabilities. Among other things, this involves implementation of technological measures that we have discussed here earlier, as well as the

creation of related practices and protocols for employees such as a reduction of in-person meetings and business travel.

Building a remote workforce beyond teams whose functions lent themselves to working remotely (such as sales representatives, software engineers, and consultants) is a substantial challenge and one that has not been tackled by most businesses. But it can be implemented with proper planning.

Technology

Preparing for a remote workforce starts with ensuring that you have the appropriate technology to facilitate it. Remote capability technologies need to be rolled out to all employees as fast as possible and you must make sure that all of them are trained and comfortable with using both the hardware and software. That is not all. Remote working brings with it a variety of security challenges, which you must also address.

At a basic level, the remote work environment can be divided into four categories.

First, you need to provide all employees with laptops. While employees may have their own laptops or personal computers, allowing them to use those devices may not be optimal for your business for two reasons. One, because of security issues. Two, because employees should ordinarily not be required to use their personal equipment for work. However, if budgetary constraints do not allow your business to provide work laptops to your employees, you can take measures to compensate employees who use their personal machines while making sure

that your business-related security concerns are addressed too. But again, this should be the last resort.

Next, you need to provide for a video conferencing and chat software. One of the biggest advantages of coming into the office is the face time employees tend to get with each other. This is why as your employees start working remotely, providing them with the best communication software you can afford will be essential to productivity. Among those is a good video conferencing platform and a good collaboration platform. For some organizations, these may be one and the same. For most, however, that will not be the case.

Regardless, it is important to streamline your solutions to the extent practicable. Certain departments and teams may already be using a few applications and tools independently. But you must ensure that you create company-wide solutions as that will reduce the chances that employees will have issues with connectivity later. After all, when employees are invited into conversations with other departments or teams, they need to be able to communicate and collaborate seamlessly with each other. Additionally, ensuring that you have a company-wide solution instead of several different ones distributed across departments and teams will reduce the burden on your IT team.

Third, you need to ensure that your remote working employees can access files and data as securely and easily as they did while working out of the office. If you are using a VPN network, you must ensure that it is set up to allow all of your employees access from their own internet connections without your security protocols blocking them. Additionally, if you have highly confidential data or information, you must select security solutions that meet your specific needs. These may include electronic signatures, secured messaging, or locked documents.

Finally, you need to implement proper project management tools. Among the biggest concerns for both managers and employees who work remotely is their ability to organize their tasks and stay on track with their work. They also want to be able to work as efficiently as possible and in sync with their team members or departments. Project management tools are essential to increasing visibility of each team member's assignments and workload. They provide for setting of milestones and tracking, and also allow managers to prioritize projects, obtain real-time analytics, and assess work performance.

Death and Taxes

An old saying goes, "nothing can be certain except death and taxes". The rise of the remote workforce has introduced new tax-related issues for small businesses. This matter is so significant that it has reached the [US Supreme Court](). More than a dozen states have weighed in on a dispute between New Hampshire and Massachusetts as to which state is entitled to tax the incomes of remote workers. In the petition, New Hampshire is taking the position that Massachusetts cannot tax the income of employees who were commuting to work in Massachusetts previously but are now working remotely from their homes in New Hampshire. This is an issue that has stumped the US Congress for years. Small business owners need to keep a close eye on how this pans out as it can have repercussions on their businesses.

Create and Communicate Clear Guidelines

Perhaps the most critical aspect of implementing a remote workplace is ensuring (1) That you have clear guidelines, protocols, and policies; and, (2) That they are clearly and explicitly communicated to your employees.

Your management team must be held accountable for monitoring compliance to the guidelines and rules. This includes, as it did in the office environment, setting clear expectations for work performance, work hours and deadlines.

Employees who have traditionally worked from home have a tendency to set their own hours. When entire teams and departments are working remotely, however, there will need to be more order particularly with regard to work hours. It is crucial to lead by example, and managers must ensure that they are themselves visibly sticking to official work hours.

While there should be stringent and regular reporting from team members to ensure efficiency and productivity in a remote work scenario, managers must also be mindful of how the substantial changes mandated by the pandemic affects their teams. For example, sales teams, particularly those who have quotas, may be quite anxious when travel restrictions or meeting cancelations are suddenly foisted upon them. Managers should be equipped to address these challenges. For example, they can remind sales teams that Covid-19 disruptions have likely had a similar impact on their prospects and customers too, and that these people will relate to the challenges your sales team is facing, particularly with regard to postponements or cancelations.

Your team should be empowered and encouraged to be creative about getting around the blockers that Covid-19 places before them. This includes substituting other forms of contact in place of meetings. For example, there is no reason why most meetings cannot occur by video conferencing. The team should also remember that their prospects are facing similar Covid-related constraints such as having to stay home or split time between the office and home. This is a great opportunity for them to be more creative with their sales tactics.

Sales quotas and targets that are already challenging can become quite daunting at this time. Managers should therefore provide their teams with additional resources and become creative with quotas in ways that benefit both the company and its employees.

Finally, company culture becomes even more important in the remote working environment. The company leadership must ensure that they incorporate regular office events such as all-hands meetings, companywide get-togethers and stand-ups into the remote work environment to the best extent possible.

Keeping Your Team Motivated, Engaged, and Connected in the Remote Office

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on work, particularly in the way that it has moved the workforce out of the physical office and forced companies to create virtual work environments. While at first blush this may appear to be simple enough, it is quite challenging not only logistically, but also in terms of maintaining productivity and morale.

Working from home comes with many benefits, but also brings with it physical isolation – from co-workers, from bosses, from team members. As we have discussed above, aside from meetings and conferences, remote workers are also deprived of the casual interactions all of us took for granted earlier, such as passing each other in the hallway and

starting a conversation, or seeing each other in the break room or the office kitchen. Also gone are the times when we broke bread together – even the times when we would share a ride to get takeout to bring back to our desks.

For managers, there are additional challenges. Bringing on a new team member is one of them. If not handled correctly, it can hurt morale and team cohesion. Similarly, the need to make business adjustments to adapt to the changes in the business landscape caused by the pandemic can present team members with additional stresses.

As a manager in a largely virtual work environment, there are some steps you can take to help boost both your team's and your own morale and keep your team motivated and engaged.

Break Isolation by Increasing Personal Interaction

Isolation and fragmentation of the workforce lowers engagement, productivity, and morale. It is incumbent on leaders and managers to meet this head on, and it all starts with communication.

Communicate

With the usual face-to-face interactions cut out of our daily work routines, it becomes even more important for employees to communicate with each other. This applies especially to leaders and managers who must make purposeful attempts to ensure that team members are clear about their roles, assignments and goals. In light of the continuous stream of challenges that the pandemic is throwing at businesses, all of these roles, assignments and goals must be repeated and reinforced in order to ensure that there is no miscommunication.

Be Inclusive

All of us have team members that we favor over others. We either find them to be easier to work with, easier to get along with, or just more competent. We tend to keep in contact with and communicate more with those we favor. Conversely, we tend to refrain from or even dread communicating with other team members. When operating out of a virtual workplace, it is important for leaders and managers to avoid this bias. Use professional software or even just a simple chart to keep a record of when you last corresponded with your team members in a group or individual setting. Also, keep a record of when you last gave them an assignment and ensure that you are dividing up responsibilities as equitably as possible.

Have Regular Meetings

It is important to keep in regular contact. This means holding standing meetings at predetermined times one or several times a week. This will get your team used to meetings and reporting on a regular basis. The advantage of holding standing meetings at predetermined times is that you do not need to coordinate everyone's schedules whenever you want to meet. Also, these meetings are always easy to cancel if circumstances mandate it, or if it is not required. In contrast, ad hoc meetings are more likely to result in poor attendance or irregular attendance by some.

Create More Humanized Communication

The variety of communication modes we have at our disposal allows us to indulge in both more personal and less personal communication. While written communication methods such as email, text, Slack, etc., are easy to use and have their place and utility, leaders should encourage the use of richer communication forms. For example, ensure that everyone holds regular face-to-face meetings using video conferencing softwares such as FaceTime, Zoom and the like. This will allow for more effective communication because when people can see each other they are able to better understand emotions, body language, and non-verbal cues, minimizing any chances of misunderstandings and miscommunications.

Create a Virtual Break Room

When everyone is working remotely, we no longer pass each other in hallways or have impromptu meetings in the break room or office kitchen. But these informal contacts are important for team building, and to create a sense of belonging. They are also important opportunities for moving projects forward without the pressure and formalities of scheduled meetings. Recreate these by having more one-on-one meetings peppered with more small talk. Also, encourage team members to call each other as needed rather than just during scheduled times.

Embrace The New Work Environment

As we have discussed earlier, the pandemic has accelerated the trend of working remotely and regardless of how it resolves, the remote workplace is with us to stay. It is therefore important for the business leadership to take steps to ensure that teams are motivated, engaged, and connected in this virtual workplace.

It will be good to remember that working remotely brings with it a number of issues that can affect participation and lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications. The new work environment, for instance, is vastly different for each of your team members as compared to the relatively homogenous environment of the office. Each team member faces different challenges and distractions at home. Some may be sharing their workspace at home with another person, others may have chronic problems with their internet connection. It is important to let them know that you appreciate the challenges they face and the effort they are making.

One way you can do this is to normalize the new work environment. The more your co-workers know about each

other's new work situations, the better they will communicate and the more connected they will feel to each other. So, without putting people on the spot, encourage virtual tours of each individual's remote work stations. Also, do your best to avoid singling people out in meetings for things such as background noise. Instead, implement procedures, such as muting when participants are not speaking.