7 steps to future proof your business

By Fabio Longano

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Who knew a year ago, when we left our offices "for a couple of weeks" to work from home, how different our lives, and our businesses would be now?

Source: www.pexels.com

As business owners, we were forced to adapt, often with more emphasis on haste than humanity. We were in do-or-die mode, with every part of our business undergoing an unexpected and violent facelift. We stopped commuting unnecessarily, face to face contact was de-prioritised for a mode of operation that was contact-proof, and we became location agnostic.

So, what does this mean for our business today? And how can we future proof it to best be prepared for whatever comes next?

Where are we now?

Well, first we need to look at where we are, before we know where we are headed to next.

We used to take the serendipity of everyday interactions for granted — the breaks they provided us, the relief and energy they restored as we move from task to task, transitioning between physical spaces. Something as simple as a daily commute or a walk to the nearest coffee shop gave us time to think, time to process and prioritise. That time is all gone. We're in constant go-mode and we now need to schedule time in our calendars for lunch or a tea break. The assumption is that because we are always at home, we are free, but we are not.

Businesses are now starting to see the serious knock-on effects as teams that thrived on the ebb and flow of productivity, collaboration, and time to breathe, are now being crushed by external pressures. People are burning out faster than companies and clients can put gas in the tank.

We're being conditioned to 'over-communicate' as new channels seem to open up every day. We're forced to join WhatsApp, Slack, Teams, Zoom, Workplace and a hundred other platforms and be on them 24/7.

Communication and information overload

It's bubbling up into communication fatigue as they all fire off at once. There's only so much we can deal with before we succumb to information and cognitive overloads. There are only so many decisions we can make in a day. We're headed for a global scale burnout.

Coupled with this is a digital bloat. Every other business is creating the "next thing" due to our new climate. That's a lot of "next things", and odds are, we're duplicating efforts and ultimately wasting energy. Would it not be more effective if we concentrated our efforts? That's what labs around the world have done to speed up the creation of a Covid vaccine. Joining forces, dividing — and then ultimately conquering. Once.

Once we've all burnt out, and the world has no choice but to return to a slower pace, there will be a resurgence in the 'slow movement' again — food, experiences, friendships. The hype and the hysteria needs to subside and people will realise they're resilient — that they're more than just their businesses or their jobs. There's more to life. We're burning through our years and our opportunities for experience like jet fuel at this rate. We'll all end up back at a more realistic pace anyway… so why succumb to unnecessary damage now?

So, with all this insight into the now, what does this mean for how we build our businesses for the future? We may not know where exactly we will be in a year or five years' time, but there are steps we can make now to ensure that we are building sustainable businesses that will still be there then.

1. Stop, pause and reflect

Think twice and act once. Do not aim to do it all, just do enough at an infinitely maintainable pace.

2. Learn to say no

We need to learn to say no, and to take a break. And empower your employees to as well. Just because we can fit another meeting slot in our calendars, doesn't mean we should.

3. Don't over communicate

Communicate just as much as you see fit for your particular situation, business or structure.

4. Partner, don't reinvent

Have an idea for the "next big thing"? Stop it! Reach out. You'd be surprised what you find. Combine your forces for good

and we shall all prevail.

5. Scale with technology in mind, but with people at heart

While the all-seeing AI and its machines are what will ultimately save us, remember, people are at the heart of everything. If we destroy our people by making things to serve them — well… we're creating a bubble that's bound to burst on itself.

6. Grow where you are planted.

Do not live reactively. Do what you're good at–what you were put on this earth to do. In a time when pivoting is the new normal, there's only so many ways that you can diversify your core competencies.

7. Most importantly, breathe.

Let your calendar stretch a little. Look after yourself, your family, health and wellbeing. Besides, none of us are good to anyone else dead, right?

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