

# 7 Things to Do if Your Small Business Closes for COVID-19.

So many small businesses have closed their doors or reduced their hours for the coronavirus. The virus is real, it's scary, and people are taking some doggone drastic action. Whether you did it voluntarily or you were voluntold, I'm very sorry you have to go through this.

Take a deep breath. You will get through this.

First things first: take care of your people. If you can assist them in getting unemployment or other support, do so. Your people come first. Always.

Next, take care of your customers. If you're closing your doors, try to do some small thing to square them away until you restart. They won't forget it. That's how loyalty is built.

Next, take care of your stuff. Square away equipment and provide for security in your absence.

Lastly, if you have accounts receivable, be sure to have a system in place to accept and deposit that money. You'll need it.

Now that you're home, what should you do? Here's seven things to do when you're reduced or shut down.

## 1. Take a break.

This has been a really long bull market. Odds are, you've been pushing hard for years with little or no time off.

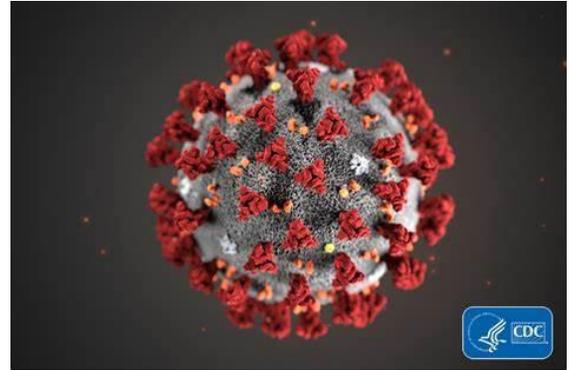
It's 100% totally okay to take a couple of days off. I don't mean visiting relatives, home improvement projects, or tinkering on that old car. I mean completely off, like binge watching a favorite show for two days kind of time off.

Try to completely unplug. Your mind needs the rest.

## 2. Grow yourself.

Once *The Office* gets old, if that's even possible, it's time to re-engage the mind a little bit. Invest in some time to grow yourself.

See, your business will never outgrow you. You are your business' primary limiter. So, growing yourself is key to coming back bigger, better, and badder than ever.



First, read. Read lots. The average American millionaire reads more than twenty non-fiction books every year. There's something about reading that taps directly into the minds of an expert in a field of business. You want to know how to have a better business? Learn from experts. Read. Go to [www.main-landdci.com/bobs-booklist](http://www.main-landdci.com/bobs-booklist) and pick a book off the list. First and early reads in each category are marked.

Second, get a coach. Obviously, you won't be meeting with a coach while in quarantine but find one and reach out to them while you have the time. Business coaches are available through CEI at [www.ceimaine.org](http://www.ceimaine.org), the Small Business Administration, and SCORE at [www.score.org/find-mentor](http://www.score.org/find-mentor). I have a SCORE coach of my own, and she is seated on a throne of wisdom.

Third, surround yourself with people who think the way you wished you thought. Read that again. Just being around them will change the way you view your business. It may be voodoo psychology, but it's also a valuable tool for growth. Check out your local Chamber of Commerce, economic development group such as the Greater Franklin Development Council at [www.greaterfranklin.com](http://www.greaterfranklin.com), or Rotary.

Another idea: form your own private group of local business and organizational leaders. I did. We call ourselves Centurions, meet weekly right in my office, and build each other into better leaders. In our case, we use biblical principles and video studies from such greats as Dave Ramsey, Patrick Lencioni, Craig Groeschel, and John C. Maxwell.

### 3. Review your situation.

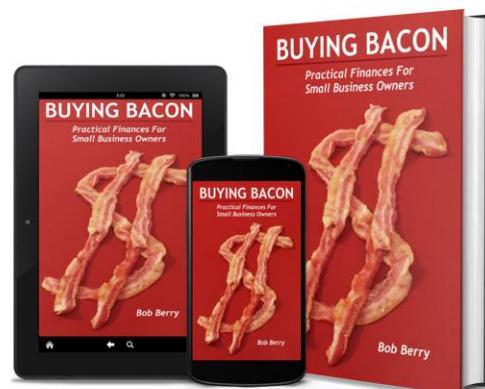
Pull your company books together and review your business' situation.

How's your inventory look? Are there any long lead time items to order?

If you just laid off your staff, are you planning to bring them all back? In what order? Who's your first call? Who shouldn't come back and why? How was your mix of senior to junior staff? Is there anyone unprofitable or very profitable? Knowing that early can relieve some stress when you're ready to reopen.

Contact your staff throughout this process. Communicate with them. Let them know what's going on to allay their fear about their job. If you don't have good news, at least tell them you're on top of it and that you're working on the business while it's closed.

How much money do you have? Do you have a budget? If you just crinkled your nose, then it's past time to make a budget. Review your accountant's reports. If you're not sure how to read them, call and ask them. Learn. Or get a book on the subject. I'm just a little biased towards *Buying Bacon: Practical Finances for Small Business Owners*. See [www.bobberryauthor.com](http://www.bobberryauthor.com) for more information.



#### 4. Strategize your organization.

Consider writing down the following.

- a. Vision statement. What do you envision the world will be like if your business is making that positive impact? “We envision that...”
- b. Mission statement. How will you go about meeting your vision? What direction will you go and what direction will you not go? A mission statement is a football field: drive towards the endzone, but don't go out of bounds.
- c. One liner. In less than 50 words, what problem does your customer have, how will you fix it, and what will their life look like after you've fixed it? “It really stinks when your septic system fails. We design new septic systems so that flushing is final.”
- d. Tag line. In five words or less, what does your business accomplish? “Helping people build.” “Feeding Farmington.” “Energizing the elderly.”
- e. BHAG. Set a Big Hairy Audacious Goal for your business. What milestone do you want to hit in five years. It should be a stretch, but potentially achievable.
- f. What will limit your business? What obstacles are in your way? Conversely, what will drive your business to thrive? What do you need to win? Make two lists, one for Limiters, one for Drivers. Sometimes this brainstorming is better in a group, so get your most senior people on a video chat and hash it out.
- g. While you have them on the line, do an Introspection Matrix. On a sheet of paper, create four columns. Label them Working, Broken, Confused, and Missing. Then brainstorm every single little thing your business does or should do. Consider things like purchasing, billing, team unity, communication, IT, vendors, delivery, etc. In what column does each item belong? Write it in.
- h. Goals. Now that you have focus for your business that you can easily communicate, plus some thoughts on limiters, drivers, and problems to fix, write down several goals needed to improve your business and make your vision, mission, and tagline be true. What goals would you have to hit to make the BHAG come true? Brainstorm as many goals as you want but pick no more than three; one for each quarter left in 2020.
- i. Strategize. Brainstorm ways to make the goals happen. For each goal, ask and answer the question, “What do I need to do to meet this goal?” There will likely be from two to five strategies for each goal.
- j. Objectives. So, you have strategies to meet goals to improve your business. What objectives must be met to bring each strategy to fruition? Make these objectives very specific. They should look more like a task list, because next to each objective you will put a name. “The one back to pat, the one throat to choke.” Some objectives will have your name. Some will have someone at your business tagged to it. That person is responsible to make sure the objective is met so the strategy will work so the goal is reached so the BHAG is realized and you can email me back in five years and tell me how awesome you're doing!

## 5. Develop a marketing plan.

A marketing plan is nothing but the steps you will take to reach out beyond the doors of your business and get everyone who might buy your product to like, know, and trust you.

That's it. Nothing too crazy.

Of course, there's much more to it. What medium do you use? Newspaper? Social media? How do you craft your message? How do you advertise? How much do you rely on referrals? How do you get referrals?

This is more than I can delve into here, but I do have some recommended reads.

First, get *Duct Tape Marketing* by John Jantsch. Read it cover to cover. This outlines the building blocks of a great marketing plan. I read this book, then sat back down and re-skimmed it, outlining a marketing plan as I went.

Next, get *Building a Storybrand* by Donald Miller. This is a how-to for crafting a message. The BS7 process now permeates all our marketing messages.

Finally, stay tuned. I will be talking more on this subject, including a practical outline of a marketing plan for folks like me who are not natural born salespeople.

## 6. Chin up and plan.

By now you can see that a little break from business may be just what your business needed.

Now that you're rested and personally growing, be motivated to get going! What you've just read will take years of implementation, a little at a time, as you work on your business.

There's no better analogy on this than Jim Collin's fly wheel in his book *Good to Great*. Picture a big horizontal stone wheel with pegs around the circumference, like you've seen in medieval-themed movies for a grist mill. You're the only one on this giant wheel, pushing a spoke as hard as you can. The wheel trembles, starts, stops, then starts again, barely moving. But as you continue to push as hard as you can, the wheel slowly picks up speed. Months later some of your staff catches your vision and start helping. The wheel picks up more speed. A year later, your whole staff is on the wheel. Five years later, you can't keep up. Time for a bigger wheel!



The point is you will need to push operational changes constantly over time to get your business going, growing, and eventually thriving. It takes time and effort.

Make a plan to pursue your plan. At Main-Land, we have a plan for improvements and growth.

- a. We have a two-day winter retreat for my senior staff every January to go over our plan, dream a little, make adjustments, and set new goals.
- b. We meet for one day quarterly to set strategies and objectives for that quarter's goal. We work one goal each quarter only, concentrating on that goal to get it done.
- c. Then we meet for an hour twice a month to report on our progress towards the objectives and make adjustments.

We have a plan to pursue our plan. Make your own plan and put it on your calendar.

## **7. Re-open!**

You started your corona time off very tired, demoralized, and scared.

The cure is some rest, education, and planning. Do that while you're closed for a couple weeks and you will re-open when the virus subsides. By that time, you'll be ready to take on your market, help your customers, and grow your business. You did it once. You can do it now, but better than ever!

*Bob Berry is owner and CEO of Main-Land Development Consultants, a land use consulting company in Livermore Falls, Maine. He is a board member for Franklin Savings Bank and an author striving to help small business owners. See [www.main-landdci.com](http://www.main-landdci.com) and [www.bobberryauthor.com](http://www.bobberryauthor.com) for more information.*