

I'm Living Through the California Wildfires – Here's How Every Business Can Prepare For a Natural Disaster

Opinions expressed by Entrepreneur contributors are their own.

As I write this, I'm surrounded by destruction and devastation. Here in Agoura Hills, California, we are on the cusp of the evacuation area, as fires have decimated thousands of homes and businesses in the Pacific Palisades and expanded westward through Malibu. Our power is out, and we are working from home off of a generator. My husband and business partner is currently conducting interviews in one corner of the house. I'm elsewhere, checking in with my team members and clients, many of whom have been personally affected by this, the worst fire disaster in the history of southern California.

Meanwhile, as I attend to the more mundane and routine business activities, such as reviewing last year's annual reports and working with my marketing partners to create new outreach campaigns, I'm filled with immense gratitude for the business I've built and my ability to attend to it even amid such extraordinary circumstances. With a raging fire virtually at our doorstep, it's all very touch and go, but it's also comforting in a way, to set all the fear and anxiety aside and focus on what I'm best at: locking in and getting my work done.

Our resilience and perseverance in this difficult moment did

not arrive by accident. By contrast, we've taken steps to ensure that our steadfastness in the face of catastrophe is part and parcel of our corporate culture.

Here are some key strategies for maintaining business continuity in a world where natural disasters are increasingly more commonplace.

Related: [3 Steps to Prepare Your Business for Wildfire Season](#)

1. Understand the deeper needs of your employees in times of crisis

When disaster strikes, your employees may experience diverse physical impacts, and they will also process the event very differently – one person to the next – on a psychological and emotional level. As a boss and a leader, they will look to you to set the tone for persevering through disaster. It's great that you've sent out an email blast with the latest updates and that your evacuation plan is posted in plain view at headquarters, but your job's not done yet.

Though your first priority is safety, your leadership in this moment also entails looking out for your employees' mental and spiritual well-being. Do this by holding one-on-one or group "check-in meetings" to discuss the effects of the disaster on your employees and those they care about. Make sure they know how to access available mental health resources. For example, some employers provide Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that include lower cost or free counseling services. In addition to practical disaster and emergency response materials, be sure to share uplifting and inspirational content with your team that showcases the strength and resilience of your community in action as they respond to the disaster at hand.

What I'm trying to emphasize with my employees at this time is

that, above all, nothing matters more than the safety and well-being of our loved ones. And, like every other moment and life event, these times of devastation will not endure forever. Be grateful for all you have. Take a deep breath. We'll get through it.

Related: [I Lost Almost Everything in a Natural Disaster. Here Is How I Recovered.](#)

2. Understand your paths to maximum resilience

The resilience of a business is determined by how quickly it can reestablish baseline operations after being impacted by a disaster. The key to maximizing resilience is to maintain a capacity *in excess* of what's required for baseline operations. To put this in simple terms, consider a cloud data storage capacity diversified across several service providers. If your business backs up its files on a multitude of cloud drives, then the failure of one drive won't hinder your normal operations.

Put even more simply: A business that maintains an emergency fund will prove more financially agile in the face of disaster than a business that lives paycheck to paycheck. Understand what your capacity for maintaining basic services looks like, then invest in resources that will allow you to operate above your baseline.

3. Plan. Plan. Plan.

This doesn't have to be difficult, and there's no need to reinvent the wheel. There are free tools available to help you evaluate your business's risks and plan accordingly. For a comprehensive preparation guide, check out the "Open for Business-EZ toolkit" from the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety. Once you fully understand your risks and the

continuity needs of your business, you'll be better positioned to take further proactive steps such as:

- Investigating appropriate insurance coverage options that suit your business's unique risk profile and covers the value of assets likely to be damaged or lost in the types of disasters most likely to affect you where you live.
- Cultivating awareness of grants and disaster relief loans for which your business may qualify.
- Understanding the vulnerabilities of the buildings, vehicles or equipment used to operate your business. How might disasters common to your area affect these resources?
- Setting up an emergency fund that can keep your business up and running through tough times.
- Determining whether or not a gasoline-powered generator or another backup power supply is a good investment to make?

Related: 8 Ways Your Business Can Avoid Disaster – and Recover If It Happens

4. Keep your customers in the loop

It's important to let your customers know when you've been affected by a natural disaster or any other event that may cause interruptions to service. Poor communication with customers, leading to unmet expectations, can make a disaster worse than it needs to be. Keep them apprised of how your business was affected and of your ongoing recovery efforts. If you can afford to, go the extra mile: offer special discounts and promotions for customers affected by the disaster. Doing so will keep good feedback coming your way and will burnish your reputation as a responsible corporate citizen.

As we continue to battle through this historic disaster in southern California, my firm, CorpNet, is doing all we can to

support the community we serve and are home to. We've rallied our employees and clients to join us in making donations to the Red Cross, the California Wildfire Relief Fund and the LA County Fire Department. We're sharing and promoting these giving opportunities, both as a practical means of responding to the disaster, but also as a means of encouraging our team members and customers to stay mentally healthy during this distressing time by giving of themselves, connecting with and supporting the community in this time of need.

Remember, whether you like it or not, there are those who look to you for leadership and inspiration. The way you run your business – and how you treat the people who help you run it – speaks volumes. Strive to build a business that will set the standard for compassion, preparedness and resilience during challenging times.

<https://www.entrepreneur.com/leadership/im-living-through-the-california-wildfires-heres-how/485616>