

THE POWER OF THE COLLECTIVE

EPISODE 04

SCENARIO PLAN LIKE A BOSS: HOW TO EVOLVE
AND FUTURE-PROOF YOUR BUSINESS PLAN

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Right now, we're all in recovery mode. But successfully leading your hotel or travel business through the worst crisis in recent memory is a delicate balancing act – between customer expectations, brand equity, and the health and safety of your teams. So we enlisted industry experts, Blake Danner and Stephen McCall, to help guide us through the new grey areas of business strategy and operations, based on their recent conversations with clients, colleagues and peers. Your future starts here.

01.

Be more flexible than ever before.

Now is the time to practice what Stephen has coined 'business yoga', and perfect your patience alongside your pigeon pose. Right now, we're being forced into all sorts of unnatural positions; worse still, they're changing every day. Openings are on hold; renovations have been shelved; grand plans postponed for the foreseeable future – but the key lies in "making peace (with this), having stillness of mind and letting go of certain things with calmness," advised Stephen. Stay present and mindful, do what you can with the tools you have, and be ready to pivot at a moment's notice. If your telephone enquiries are up, re-train your team on phone etiquette. If your website traffic is spiking, invest in SEO. React to short-term change with a long-term strategy, and be willing to adapt as needed.



02.

Practice empathetic leadership.

From furloughs to cutbacks to ceasing operations entirely, most of our organisations have suffered trauma – both economic and personal – in the last few months. Keep this in mind when leading your teams through recovery. "Now more than ever, I have to give specific direction, be incredibly empathetic and transparent – my crystal ball is no good anymore," admits Blake. Your colleagues may feel trepidation and excitement at returning to work (see point #3); they may have also experienced personal tragedy during this unprecedented period. Keep them updated, show them their safety is your priority, and maintain a frank, open dialogue. "Don't be too confident in your point of view – all of us have made false steps," opined Stephen. "Have humility and be prepared to change quickly when proven wrong."

03.

Balance guest expectations with staff safety.

There's been as many future predictions as Zoom calls during this pandemic – but as we inch closer to recovery, not everything is evolving in the way we expected. Take sanitation concerns, for instance; many initially forecasted these would be customers' biggest barrier to hotel entry, and while this is true in some quarters, Blake has actually experienced the opposite. "We responded to experts by creating contactless check-in, keyless entry and virtual menus – but our guests are now saying: 'I want a key. Hand me a menu,'" he told the collective. So how do you reconcile customer preferences with a responsibility to protect your staff? Stephen's Locke properties have Perspex screens for desk staff and zoned-off areas in the lobby, while Blake's Proper hotels are training their people on successful guest interactions while wearing masks – from eye inflection to hand gestures. "We're doing normal things in a sanitary manner; holding people to social distancing rules, but without making them feel monitored," Blake summarised.

04.

Don't lose sight of your brand ethos.

While it's important to change and adapt to this 'new normal,' carefully consider every decision and adaptation you make to your property. The hotel lifecycle is such that "any fundamental changes you make to your property means you're locked in for a long time," warned Stephen. Avoid rash decisions or bandwagon-jumping; if it doesn't instinctively feel right for your brand – or could even damage the guest experience – it's probably not for you. "Our hotels are built on design, and we won't disrupt or interrupt what makes us special," Blake agreed. Instead, dig deep into what your brand truly stands for, innovate and find new revenue streams that align with these values. If your hotel is known for its F&B, why not try artisanal grocery services, cooking masterclasses, or focus on outdoor dining outlets?



05.

Have faith in hospitality.

Much has been said to highlight our industry's historic resilience in recent months and both panellists remain optimistic about its future. "This has been an incredible, novel experience for everyone, but hospitality always recovers because it's in our nature – it's how people are programmed," reassured Stephen. "If you have faith in that, you have to believe people will want to gather again in groups." And in an industry constantly evolving and predicated on human connections, it's critical to keep looking ahead and not get too caught up in the present. "I see a lot of brands talking about cleanliness – but surely that's table stakes, not the fundamental essence of any brand," pointed out Stephen. Remind yourself that hospitality stands for something far deeper; remember why you got into this business in the first place, and make decisions based on what you want our future to look like.