

Resilience in Business

UNDERSTANDING THE DEFINITION OF RESILIENCE ...

“Resilience is the ability to protect and grow value in the face of rapidly changing external conditions.”...Forbes

This morning, my presentation is from the perspective of two capacities, as President of the GMSA and as an innovative owner of businesses, who sees this an opportunity to share some of my experiences.

Business Resilience in essence, is your company’s adaptability and readiness to face disasters and disruptions while remaining continuously operational and avoiding costly downtime. Naturally, resilience varies from company to company and industry to industry. However, there is no doubt that, resilient organizations are more likely to survive economic downturns and uncertainties over those organizations without a Business Continuity Plan.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC was the ultimate test of business resilience.

Today, we cannot talk about Business Resilience without focusing on the unforgiving Covid-19 pandemic. The unprecedented virus has had an undoubted catastrophic effect on people, businesses, and economies globally. It is critical that companies learn from this experience and embark on rigorous post-pandemic, recovery planning. However, we must recognize how companies swiftly demonstrated their resilience DURING the pandemic, which ultimately helped them gain an advantage in the current post-pandemic economy.

Let’s look at technology providers. Global lockdown meant limited mobility and the immediate need for remote working. Companies immediately invested in programs and connectivity tools such as Zoom and MS Teams to maintain operations without geographical limitations. Digitization and automation processes were inevitably accelerated, ensuring organizations maintain their service without compromising on customer-experience. It is quite interesting to note that some employers have opted to continue with the remote working facility, citing beneficial savings on commute time and costs.

The manufacturing and services industries were also facing uncertainties. Opportunities to mass produce and supply “essential” items such as hand sanitizers, masks, ventilators and PPE emerged. Right here in Guyana, companies reinvented themselves and converted their supply chain to facilitate these essentials. The food and hospitality industries also reinvented their services during the crisis. Not only here in Guyana, but in Trinidad likewise, consumers could now order meals using food apps, including paying for these meals and having them delivered directly.

ENTREPRENEURS WILL ALWAYS BE FACED WITH DILEMMAS

As an entrepreneur for over 25 years, I have realized that there are three inevitable states of business, especially during the first formative years: You are either IN a dilemma, GOING INTO a dilemma of COMING OUT of a dilemma. For me, I had many “black swan” events that almost crippled my very own business. However, in anticipation of other threats, my company’s resilient strategies prepared me even more for the unforeseen threats.

One of the key aspects to staying the course and emerging successful is the support and commitment of your team. In order to mitigate these risks outside of the four walls of the company, and minimize impact of future vulnerabilities - improved strategies for business continuity must be developed and implemented.

As SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES (SIDS) we have to be even more prepared for disasters.

Trinidad and Guyana are among the listed Small Island Development States (SIDS), which is the coined term by the United Nations, for smaller, more vulnerable countries that share similar challenges which affect the nation's development and growth. Just like Guyana, Trinidad is susceptible to threats of natural disasters, limited resources, dependence of international trade, shortage of skills, and high energy and transportation costs, just to name a few.

Partnership between the both countries that are ideally geographically positioned to work together must realize the crucial role in fostering dialogue, knowledge-sharing and learning between both nations and beyond. Resilience is by far one of the largest priority areas of partnerships. Often a partnership for resilience arises because a business has identified risks or opportunities for its own business within communities in which they operate or those of their suppliers or customers.

At its core, investing in partnerships is a direct strategy towards resilient country development which will bring about sustainable and transformative change. Guyana and Trinidad must work together and invest more in strengthening long-term capacity, looking to governments, civil society and the private sector to build collective resilience. One of the most immediate avenues is leveraging off the skills and competencies of Trinidad's workforce, whether it's skilled and unskilled laborers or professionals.

Natural disasters – We are not immune to these occurrences. What contingencies are in place to ensure resilience and disaster risk reduction? Some of the concepts put in place by each country relative to climate change, is unfamiliar to other countries. It is prudent for us within the region, sharing the same natural disaster zone, to work towards common goals that focus on climate change adaptation and resilience. We need a more regional collaborative approaches and Resilient Development Framework to ensure our CARICOM brothers and sisters, are safe.

Supporting SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPEMENT GOALS (SDGs) will also help to become more resilient.

SDGs are humanity's ambitious but not impossible, plan for protecting the foundation of three main areas of preservation and sustainable development: Ecological, Economic and Social. The 17 goals developed by the United Nations encourage members to focus on the vision of a world free from poverty, hunger and disease.

The terms "sustainability" and "resilience" are sometimes referred to as the same concept, however, they are both differing concepts that are closely inter-connected. Generally, resilience is intended to enrich the strategies for sustainability.

With the current global climate, unforeseen, unavoidable challenges are emerging daily. This is where resilience comes into play. We are cognizant that these challenges have many negative consequences to individuals, countries and the environment alike. However, resilience development strategies anticipate these challenges and help us plan in advance, ways to tackle and overcome unprecedented events, ensuring minimum disruptions to business and livelihoods. To be successful, SGDs and resilience need to go hand in hand.

The Global Resilience Partnership (GRP) has therefore set out six (6) key principles that guide the approach to resilience in order to achieve the SDGs:

1. Embrace complexity.
2. Recognize constant change.
3. Enable inclusive decision-making.
4. Enhance ecosystems integrity.
5. Promote flexibility and learning.
6. Leverage innovation and opportunity

From a PERSONAL and PRACTICAL perspective, which will most definitely be relevant to the TTMA Members, I would like to leave you with Eight Key Rules for Building Business Resilience:

- 1) **Diversify** but within areas of your core strength. Quite often we get involved with other businesses because it may seem glorious from the outside and lucrative in the moment. If you are adventurous enough to diversify and invest in products and sectors that are unfamiliar to your strengths, ensure that resilient and flexible systems are developed that are sufficient to respond to possible negative impacts immediately.
- 2) We must get out of a restrictive conservative view of business. **We must think big and not small.** Startups are encouraged borrow small but have a vision to grow big in the future. Have a vision that will take you beyond 10 years without putting yourselves in unmanageable debt.
- 3) **Identify your strength and weakness while staying committed.** Business is not for everyone. Quite often I see businesses struggling or failing because they think it is greener on the other side. When a crisis hits – the leaders of those companies are unable to be resilient. Business is not an opportunity for everyone to be involved in. Also, sometimes we get involved in business with little knowledge.
- 4) **Business failure – Perseverance and Resilience** are closely linked. Failure will happen. Plan for failures. Remember the 3 states of Dilemmas which I mentioned earlier (We are either IN a dilemma, GOING INTO a dilemma of COMING OUT of a dilemma. You cannot build resilience if you cannot accept failure. Accepting that failure happens means you can prepare. Preparing, setting yourself up with a growth mindset and avoiding isolation can help you move through failure more easily. I strongly encourage business leaders to have a Mentor who can support you on your journey. We are never too seasoned to have a Mentor.
- 5) **We should not take criticisms personally** but see criticisms to be analytical as we look at methods to improve your abilities to advance your businesses. This would help you to build Resilience. Price-Quality-Reliability-Consistency are the corner stones to any successful business. Don't be defensive, be proactive instead of reactive. Etc. Poor customer service, Non-compliance to standards, Poor packaging and labeling.

- 6) **Try new approaches and keep innovating.** We become complacent. Keep doing things to advance the business. **Don't wait for the customer or client to come to you. Be proactive and go out to the market place in order promote your business – don't wait for orders to come to you.** Take the initiative. Come out of the comfort zone. This is how we can practically be resilient.

- 7) **We are often too busy competing among ourselves** while missing golden opportunities. Our market is not just Trinidad or Guyana; we have global opportunities. We often destroy another in the process while missing opportunities. We have a tradition of minding other people's business and our own business suffers. There is a massive increase of imports extra-regionally which we do nothing about. But when there is a small encroachment in our market space from within the region – we go all out to protect it. Instead, let's pursue how can we have a coming together to facilitate the common good.

- 8) **Build and strengthen** our businesses as we venture into new markets. So we can come with strength and resilience to successfully compete in the prevailing conditions of those markets.

Don't Be Surprised, Be Prepared!

Thank you!