

Virus proof your small business

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Business coach and author Douglas Kruger provides practical ways your business can survive - and even thrive - during this time of uncertainty.

There are always silver linings. There are always smart ways forward, and we should never lose hope. Growth may be just around the corner, both for you and for the nation. As part of Saica's *Leadership in a Time of Crisis* webinar series, business coach and author, Douglas Kruger, shared the practical things you can do to keep your own profit-over-cost ratio as healthy as possible, for as long as possible through practical tools to survive the Covid-19 crisis.

Douglas Kruger recently published his latest business book, *50 Ways to Survive the Covid-19 Crisis*, and he shared some of the practical tools that have made the book an international hit.

1. Managing your mind during the crisis

The whole world is going through a uniquely stressful time and, for Kruger, it's essential that we make the choice to fight for our businesses. "What you do for a living matters greatly to humanity," he says. "In South Africa, we have something like 25 dependents per tax-paying individual, so here, more than anywhere else, it matters greatly that businesses stay open and continue to flourish."

So the next question is, what can you do if you start to feel stuck and depressed?

Load into your mind a rescue programme: If you feel stuck, recognise the trigger and make a conscious choice to do something instead that you pre-loaded into your mind. This can be making a cup of coffee, walking around the garden or taking a shower. "It doesn't matter what you do," says Kruger, "the important thing is to break the pattern of a funk."

Try to keep your intake of news and social media to a minimum: Although you do need to know what's happening in the world and in big business around you, Kruger argues that news is 90% your enemy and 10% your friend, and that social media is even worse. "It's all predicated on a sense of frenzy and doom and gloom, and that is not helping you right now," he says.

Consider using schedules for your day: There is something to be said for getting up at the same time each day, doing whatever your morning routine used to be, then dividing your day into productive chunks. "Research shows that the most productive period is 90 minutes," says Kruger. "If you are working on a large project, lock yourself up and focus for 90 minutes, then come up for air, walk around the garden and so on," he advises. "Simply dividing your day in advance gives you a sense of structure, which can be very comforting and useful from a psychological perspective."

Location matters: Where you work has a bearing on your psychology, so if possible, try and create a healthy workspace,



Business coach and author Douglas Kruger

and work in different areas during the day, such as half an hour in the garden, and so on.

Dress for success: Embodied cognition refers to how we perceive ourselves based on how we dress and present ourselves. “How you dress is for *you* at the moment, not for the outside world, but it has an effect on your psychology, so bear that in mind when you choose your outfit.”

Make a ‘Vulcan’ list. Vulcans are the unemotional logic-driven creatures from *Star Wars*, so making what Kruger calls a Vulcan list can help you move through unpleasant tasks quickly. Do you have to let staff go? Schedule difficult conversations? “Doing fundamentally unpleasant things can weigh very heavily on your mind and your conscience,” says Kruger. “Move them onto the Vulcan list and work through them as soon as you possibly can.”

2. How to manage your staff

“To the credit of business owners around the world, and particularly in South Africa, we have been deeply concerned about staff, and how to keep them employed and fed. I feel that speaks very highly of entrepreneurs,” says Kruger.

A little is better than nothing: “If you can pay your staff a small amount but not the full amount, please ensure that you pay them a small amount,” says Kruger. “Remember we have 25 dependants per tax-paying person in South Africa, so the smallest amount can be life-saving under the circumstances.” Kruger suggests that if you need to lay off half your staff, perhaps rather introduce shifts. “If you have 100 staff members, allow 50 to work for a two-week period and the other 50 to work for the next two weeks,” he says. “That way everyone is receiving at least enough to stay alive.”

Repurpose your staff: What core skills and knowledge do your staff have? If for example you have people who have been working as digital game designers, that implies they have coding skills. What else could they do with those skills? “The first way you could repurpose these skills is by giving your staff the freedom to freelance for someone else,” says Kruger. “Alternatively, you can retain them and hire them out, either locally or internationally.” Kruger recommends sites such as UpWork and Fiverr.com to help you outsource your staff’s skills.

Digital tips: Can you create the functionality by which the public can give you and your staff digital tips? That can make a big difference right now. “To a large extent, generous consumers are looking for ways to support small business, so if you can, make that functionality available to generate a bit more income,” advises Kruger.

Upskill your staff: This doesn’t need to cost anything, it can be as simple as watching YouTube videos to improve your skills in certain areas, on company time. Alternatively, there are many courses on skills such as coding, management and so on from top universities that are currently available for free.

3. How to do business differently

What creative things might you do that will keep you going over the medium to long term?

Ask yourself what you are not going to do: The world is in flux, you have the leeway to make strategic choices, and get rid of things that are cumbersome.

Look creatively at your cash flow: There are simple and clever ways to keep the cash flow going for your business, such as selling vouchers or offering incentives for people to buy now and receive later.

Use this time to position yourself for future success: Are there things you can do to position yourself as a thought leader so you come out stronger on the other side? Kruger cautions that everyone is doing this, so he suggests keeping your communications short and sharp.

Reconfigure your business: There are clever and radical ways to keep your doors open. Assuming you no longer can sell what you previously did, can you figure out what your customers need right now and serve them? “The upside is that

you are still serving the same people and positioning yourself as their go-to source,” says Kruger. “This is also an area where you can repurpose your staff and skills in new and creative ways.”

4. Online realities

“If you haven’t been an online business before, congratulations, you are now,” says Kruger. “The world was heading that way in a hurry, even prior to the crisis, and now it is non-negotiable.” He offers advice on how to ensure your business is internet-ready.

Check your online functionality: The stats are staggering on how many businesses are unaware that their websites are down. “Attempt to do business with yourself,” suggests Kruger. “Go onto your website, send yourself a message and, if you have e-commerce capacity, make an online order.” If all of this is up and running, that’s an excellent start.

Look for tone deaf advertising: Times have changed dramatically, so your old adverts may be unintentionally embarrassing. Make sure you don’t have a banner advertising a glorious trip to Wuhan China or photos of large crowds of people gathered together.

Try not to do boring updates: How many emails have you received with the subject line, *Covid-19 update*? Can you be more interesting than that?

Make online shopping easy: The ease in which people can shop with you online, can actually increase their spend, so get rid of any unnecessary barriers and hurdles.

Safety and hygiene have become paramount: If you are interacting with clients in any physical sense, make a point of advertising that you are doing so safely and hygienically.

5. Strategic rule-breaking

“Every rule comes with an attendant cost and an attendant burden,” says Kruger. Whether this is in terms of time or revenue, we have very limited resources right now and the burden of rules may be enough to sink a small business.

According to Kruger, we can look at this idea of strategic rule-breaking in two ways. If you are the owner of the rules or regulations, consider what you can legally do to ease, relax or pause those burdensome regulations for a time for your clientele. “People need it now more than ever.”

The second thing to consider, is what leeway do you need right now? Can you appeal to your regulatory body for a pause, relaxation or complete ridding of those rules for a time? If you do it as an industry, you will have more power, and remember that it may not have occurred to the regulatory body that relaxing the rules will help, so it’s always worth asking.

Kruger closes with the reminder to consider profitability over cost. “Many businesses are looking at how to save money, but we also need to look at creative ways to make money, and help our clients to do so, too,” he reminds us. “It’s no good to conserve your way into the grave, we need to try and find alternative revenue streams right now that could keep our business going.”

To help address the challenges faced by many, Saica hosted a complimentary virtual leadership series called Leadership in a time of crisis. This series focused on various elements affecting individuals, businesses and the profession as a whole during the Covid-19 pandemic. Sessions in this series have been recorded and can be viewed on [Saica’s events page](#).

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