

# It's Time to Embrace the Uncomfortable

By **Jessica Newhall**

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Nassim Talib published “Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder” in 2012. He describes antifragility as being “beyond resilience or robustness.” That “the resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better.” To say the small business community has been shocked by this pandemic is an understatement. In early-March many businesses were emerging from the depth of winter and looking hopefully to the return of longer daylight hours and with that, visitors to the region who would bring much needed dollars to buoy their waning reserves. The cash flow generated by this essential season would enable the re-hiring of additional employees, pay for inventory pre-

ordered earlier in the year and restore cash reserves depleted from off-season remodels.

The COVID-19 pandemic suddenly forced business owners to face an uncomfortable reality that commitments made to customers, present and future employees, suppliers, partners and other stakeholders may not be able to be kept. That investments made in forging customer relationships with careful marketing strategies, hiring and training the ideal employees, painstakingly working to refine product offerings, and make carefully planned financial commitments might be for naught.

Yet, if the past has taught us anything, we have seen mass innovation follow times of great crisis. Is that too grand a hope for our small business community? It is not. Our community will rise, not as a Phoenix, but rather as a Hydra, the Greek

mythological creature that has numerous heads. When one is cut off, two grow back in its place.

Leading through difficult times, whether it be this pandemic or other difficulty requires that business owners harness the passion, energy and tenacity that inspired them to get into business in the first place. This begins with recognizing fear and anxieties, then quickly identifying strategies to move forward proactively.

Look around you, you will see some great examples of businesses throughout the region whose “heads may be cut off” but are growing two back in its place. Retail business owners like Karen Emmerling of Beach Books in Seaside or Pat & Tom Leiner of Pat’s Pantry in Astoria are great examples of how to lean into this situation by being agile and adaptive to the situation at hand.

Emmerling leveraged the unique skills and personalities of her staff to build Beach Books’ social media presence (@beachbooks on Instagram), resulting in increased online, pre-order and local delivery orders. The Leiners were forced to move to curbside pick-up and quickly recognized that their online ordering platform and point-of-sale were not integrating- so they quickly pivoted to implement a new solution that delivered a more seamless customer experience online (<https://www.patspantryastoria.com/>). We can all learn from the example they have set- in business and in how we personally approach difficult times as leaders. We must not be afraid to lean in and embrace the uncomfortable. Being a Hydra may not feel good when the head comes off- but the ability to see both in front of you and behind at the same time can be a pretty powerful tool.

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