

Small business recovery takes a village

Here's how to do your part

By **Jessica Newhall**
Clatsop Community College
Small Business Development Center

Recently, I took advantage of a lovely spring evening with a stroll around the downtown of Astoria. Along my path I heard a sound that was at once pleasantly familiar but also simultaneously jarring in that it had so long been absent from my life. I looked to where it was coming from and saw couples and small groups gathered around safely distanced barrels outside Blaylock's Whiskey Bar and they were having a grand ole time! It was then that it struck me how long it had been since I had heard this kind of noise- of people actively enjoying each other's company and fully participating in life! This filled me with a sense of hope for a future post-pandemic. Unfortunately, not more than a week later, Clatsop County businesses and consumers were back on the roller coaster, as we moved into "High Risk" with a real probability that "Extreme Risk" could well be on its heels.

To say this was disappointing was an understatement. When the approval and rollout of the vaccine commenced, a sense of optimism in society began to arise. Virus contractions, hospitalizations and death rates started to shrink from their heightened levels following the holidays. Businesses began to reopen and stabilize. Schools started going back to in-person. Sports started up again. Unfortunately, though, this reopening has not been without its challenges. Vaccine rollout has experienced some stumbles and, as viruses do amongst the unvaccinated, the numbers of individuals infected and hospitalized began rising. So here we find ourselves, well over a year into the pandemic, likely exhausted, frustrated and not surprisingly, our will to seemingly hold our breath and wait until the all clear is sounded for us to get back to normal life is waning.

For small business owners, particularly those whose business models are severely impacted by the changing risk levels, the return of this instability is incredibly draining—physically and emotionally. At the Small Business Development Center, our team of small business advisors has been working with business owners on how to manage through this—and one of the striking challenges that business owners report facing is their own customer's reluctance to support their recovery. So, we thought it would be helpful to share some tips on how you can help small businesses recover as we move forward:

- Consider local and small first. Before you click "buy" on that Amazon order, consider whether you could find those same products, or similar, somewhere locally—hopefully at a small, independently owned store. Yes, you may have to put in the extra effort of driving to the location or paying a slightly higher price, however you will be supporting local business owners and jobs and therefore keeping your dollars invested in your community.

- Patience is a virtue. With our tighter labor supply, many small businesses are struggling to find enough employees to be fully staffed. This can mean longer lines to check out or waiting a bit more for your food to be prepared and served. If you find yourself getting frustrated, perhaps consider how you can channel that energy into something positive: practicing some deep breathing, turn to the person behind you in line and strike up a conversation, or simply find something on your phone to distract yourself during your wait. Those who are serving you will thank you for your patience and you will have created goodwill all around!

- Embrace flexibility. We have become an "on demand" society—accustomed to getting what we want, when we want it. Yet over the last year we have had to, albeit reluctantly, acknowledge that the adage, "you don't always get what you want" may in fact be something we have to accept. Yet sometimes when we don't get exactly what we want we are able to discover something new and exciting. So, if the café is out of your selection, or the store does not have exactly what you were looking for and suggests an alternative, perhaps consider what the thrill of discovery of trying something new or different



Jessica Newhall

might bring to your life.

- Practice kindness. One of the biggest challenges business owners are facing is rude customers taking their frustrations out on the very staff trying to serve them. If you find yourself getting a bit hot under the collar, try to remember that these are challenging times for everyone, we are all in this together and that small business owners and their employees are likely doing the best they can under incredibly challenging circumstances. Before you

lash out in person or online, ask yourself what you are hoping to accomplish out of doing so and could there be a better, more reasoned way to handle your feelings?

- Consider vaccination. We are currently at a 35% vaccination rate in the US. That means 65% of our population is still unvaccinated. The bottom line is that until the government and society feel we have this virus under control there is going to be no return to stability and normalcy for any of us, small businesses included. Widespread vaccination is the clearest and fastest path to achieving that. So, if you are holding out on vaccination, perhaps it is worth thinking about what your choice means for our ability to put these challenging times behind us.

One individual, one business owner, one consumer cannot get this done on their own. The sooner we acknowledge our individual responsibility to each other, work towards common solutions and build goodwill, the faster we get to the recovery we all crave. The time is now for us all to do our part so our world, community, economy and lives can move forward.

Jessica Newhall is the associate director and Small Business Management program manager for the Clatsop Community College Small Business Development Center. She can be reached at jnewhall@clatsopcc.edu.

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