



THE EXPRO EXPERIENCE

September 2nd, 2020

COPING WITH COVID

Here are the rules we find most useful in managing our business during this crisis:

- Take care of your employees
- Take care of the public
- Be flexible
- Take the pandemic seriously



OPERATING A SMALL BUSINESS DURING A PANDEMIC

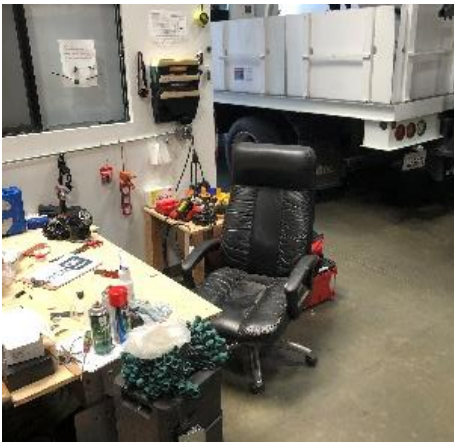
No small business owner wants to shut down for *any* reason, let alone because of a public health emergency. Whether you are considered an essential business or are recently coming back online, we are all in the same environment. It's hard enough dealing with everyday management stresses, and putting it lightly, the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown a wrench in the works. But the entrepreneurial spirit is a resilient thing. There's only so much you can prepare for, and how you manage a disaster can easily determine whether or not your business even *exists* next year. Here are a few of the ways Exterior Products has reshaped our workplace for the COVID era.

TAKE CARE OF YOUR EMPLOYEES

Your staff is your most important asset. Without them, you won't be able to achieve much, if anything at all. When a pandemic threatens everyone's livelihoods – and lives – it only makes sense to preserve the resource that makes your work possible; your employees.

Before the pandemic, most of us could probably never imagine the decisions with which we are now faced.

- 1) Temperature screen all of your employees when they enter the building, and keep good records of having done so. You never know when OSHA might want to stop by to see how you've been handling things! This can be self-administered and everyone can sign off in less than 10 seconds.
- 2) Provide everyone with masks, face coverings, gloves, and any other necessary PPE. Your employees should never fear coming in to work. They need to know you're looking out for their personal safety, and they need to actually *be* safe so you can maintain a reliable workforce. KN95 masks, nitrile gloves, sanitizer, alcohol in spray bottles and clean towels are standard issue and found in every vehicle, office and restroom here.
- 3) Reroute foot traffic to a one-way system, as much as is practical. For ExPro, this meant locking certain doors (including the front door), allowing entry only through our warehouse door, and installing a window in our front wall for deliveries. This prevents any delivery personnel or vendors physically entering the front office workspace. Signing for deliveries through the window reduces contact and acts as a solid barrier.



COVID-compliant workspaces and equipment

- 4) Install plexiglass or other plastic shielding wherever two people will be interacting with one another. All of the employee- and public-facing desks at Exterior Products are surrounded with custom-made acrylic sneeze guards to minimize employee exposure.
- 5) Separate employees as much as you can, and require mask usage when separation is not possible. We limit our vehicles' occupancies and space out workstations in our warehouse, using all available space to keep them in compliance with the 6' social distancing guidelines.

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- 6) Make sure you stay tuned into your HR responsibilities. We are now faced with the challenges of remote working, interpreting the changes made by state and local governments, and adhering to endlessly shifting laws and regulations. We have employed the services of [Platinum HR Consulting Group](#) to help us stay in compliance. In addition, we have updated our employee manuals under the watchful eye of Scott & Whitehead labor law attorneys. FFCRA leave is an option for some employees, but not all of them – for example, if an employee's child is back in the classroom for school as opposed to learning remotely, employees may not meet the eligibility requirement. Before the pandemic, most of us could probably never imagine the decisions with which we are now faced. Working more closely with an HR firm has been a lifeline.

TAKE CARE OF THE PUBLIC

Exterior Products is not a retail establishment, but we do work in people-filled spaces like shopping centers and municipalities. So naturally, we take precautions to protect anyone occupying the workspace.

- 1) Require everyone who enters your building to wear a mask. If you own the business, you make the rules! Nobody can claim exemption from mask-wearing due to a health concern. If they have a health concern, they should *not* be out and about during a pandemic! We require our employees to wear masks on all jobs and while working in the warehouse.
- 2) Install signage to clear up any confusion about where people should be standing at any given time. We have a couple of attractive signs for our front door and delivery window which help our vendors and delivery drivers see where we'd like our shipments to go.
- 3) Clean frequently-touched surfaces *daily*, and do a deep clean once a week. We spray everything down with 70% isopropyl alcohol so often, we sometimes wonder if we should set up a contract with the brewery across the street from us. They probably have plenty of alcohol, right?



Necessary additions to our tools of the trade: isopropyl alcohol, KN95 masks, hand sanitizer and paper towels.



Each truck has a fully-stocked hand sanitizing station (and yep, by sheer luck, we purchased those precious Purell wipes months before they were worth their weight in gold!)

BE FLEXIBLE

Like many small businesses, Exterior Products is dealing with its fair share of COVID-related losses and pain. PPP loans have been spent, contracts have been canceled or reduced and federal loans never seem to be quite enough. While some government resources are available to help, they certainly do not provide any of us with the kind of stability we could expect during normal business operations. Many industries are struggling through a historic downturn in available work.

All we can do is show up to work and strive to make it a great day because we said so! We continue to offer a comprehensive and diverse set of services to property managers, building owners, commercial tenants, and municipalities. We have even teamed up with some reputable contractors to extend our reach into other trades, increasing value for our clients and keeping the money momentum moving forward. Better to have a very small percentage of a revenue than none at all.

TAKE THE PANDEMIC SERIOUSLY

If you are of the opinion that there is no point in making any adjustments to the way you do business while COVID-19 rages on, you are probably not someone who would read this blog post in the first place. We simply want to share the

information we gather while simultaneously educating ourselves on what others are doing to deal with this successfully.

If any of our readers have a crystal ball, please contact us as soon as humanly possible! In the meantime, a bit of due diligence will make you, your employees, and your customers safer and happier.

*Opinions and experiences courtesy of Katie and Jeff
(we hope they were helpful!)*