The following is the full Q&A with Bryan Strawser, Principal & Chief Executive, Bryghtpath LLC

In the short-term (say, the next month or so), what are the best/worst steps that businesses can be taking, particularly small businesses?

Right now, companies should be focused on ensuring the safety of their employees, shifting to work from home strategies as much as possible, and ensuring that their upstream suppliers are well-positioned to weather the storm and continue to deliver services to your organization. In particular, regular communication to employees about what is happening within the business and thanking them for their work during these extraordinary times.

Companies should also be making regular contact with their customers, advising them of what they are doing to maintain continuity of services for them - changes to the business, such as reduced/modified hours, changes in services, and so on.

Depending on the business a company is in, it may be impossible for some roles to work from home. In these situations, it is critical that companies ensure that they are taking the right steps to protect their team from a health and safety standpoint - and that they develop procedures and modify policies as appropriate for positive cases/exposure in the workplace, sick leave, attendance, pay & benefits, and more.

In terms of the worst steps, I think ignoring this crisis or pretending it's "just like the flu" are among the worst things that a company can do right now. I'd follow that with not taking care of your team in the current circumstances as well.

Same thing in the long-term. What should businesses be looking for now that they can focus on addressing after this particular crisis is over? In other words, how can they use this crisis to help prepare for the next one?

In the long-term, companies should be looking at their overall financial health and how that may change in the coming weeks and months as the economy slows down. What risks exist that should be addressed? How might changes in direction from public health agencies and government impact our business in the coming weeks and months? What should we do today to ensure we are positioned for success and long-term continuity in the coming weeks.

It's also never too early to start thinking about what the "new normal" will look like when things do return to normal weeks or months down the road. How will your operating model change? Will telework, as an example, be more accepted than it was before? Are some of your long-time processes that were pushed aside during the crisis, things that shouldn't come back?

Companies owe it to themselves to take a hard look at what they learned during this crisis - and apply those lessons to improve their resiliency and challenge assumptions about their current operating model.

What are some short-term technology solutions that businesses can be using to help get through this pandemic? In the long-term, what technology strategies can businesses take to avoid getting caught "flat-footed" by similar situations in the future?

In the short-term, virtual collaboration software is definitely an area where companies can leverage technology to help get their the Coronavirus Pandemic. Online video conferencing software, cloud-based project management tools, persistent chat systems, document sharing and collaboration are all areas were software has enabled businesses to work remotely and yet still be productive. Virtual Private Network capability (and having the right capacity) has also proven critical for some companies.

In the long-term, these are tools that companies should have in place prior to a major crisis situation like the current pandemic rather than have to chase them as the crisis escalates.

Again, post-crisis, this is an area that I think companies should take the time to think about and evaluate as we return to the "new normal." What has changed within our business that we want to capture moving forward? How has technology enabled or hindered our work?

In what ways should a business's response to the Covid-19 pandemic mirror their response plans for other emergencies (active shooters, natural disaster, etc)? How does/should it differ?

When we're working with clients to construct crisis management frameworks and plans, we always guide them towards the idea that the way in which you manage a crisis doesn't really change much from one situation to another. You're still going to have an incident that escalates into a crisis as certain thresholds or triggers are crossed. You're still going to pull your crisis management team together - you'll still have decisions that need to be escalated to your executives and/or your board. You're still going to have to collaborate across the organization to make decisions - and communicating those decisions will still be a major task.

I don't think that the situation a company faces changes their crisis management process - you want the muscle memory of how crisis situations are managed and communicated to be the same across the different emergencies.

What does differ is there may be tactics and strategies that are specific to certain situations. For example, the Coronavirus epidemic has a large public health and human resources component for companies to address - there's a large business continuity challenge - there could be technology challenges with work from home / remote work.

These are quite different challenges than a company faces in an active shooter situation.

We've always been strong advocates for building a consistent crisis management framework, plans, and processes. Then, the situation doesn't matter, the organization has a collaborative decision-making and communication framework that helps them lead through any situation.

What online resources should businesses know about to help them in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic?

There are a number of excellent resources available online - here are a few examples

- CDC: Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Main Page
- CDC: Coronavirus Guidance for Businesses
- US Government: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Resource Page
- McKinsey & Company: Coronavirus: Leading through the Crisis
- Bryghtpath's Managing Uncertainty Podcast:
    - Episode #94: Personal and family preparedness for Coronavirus
    - Episode #95: Lessons learned to date from the Coronavirus fight

What steps can businesses (or individual workers) take to minimize the disruption caused by the need to telework?

Unless your organization has teleworked regularly across all employee classifications, it can be a jarring transition to a new way of collaborating. We strongly recommend that you put together some specific tips and tricks (best practices) for your team to follow to be most effective while teleworking.

We've even seen companies have some fun with this - by collecting fun "things not to do while teleworking" or having folks post pictures of their work at home setups - this can help bring some much needed levity to the virtual workplace.

Any additional information or insights you'd like to share?

I can't emphasize enough the need to communicate regularly with your team and your customers.

Your employees want and need to hear from leadership at your company about what's going on and how current events impact the business. Your customers need to know that you're leading a viable organization that will be around for them throughout the current crisis. Honest and authentic leadership and communication is strongly needed in every company right now.