

Business Mourning Business

I think it goes without saying that COVID-19 has had a serious impact on business throughout the land. As lockdown approached, some businesses adapted and evolved their operations as required to meet the demands of their marketplace whilst staying within government guidelines.

A lot of these have been SME's and there has been some great stories of those who have done so. I am particularly fond of the award winning country pub and restaurant that had to close due to government restrictions. They now have become the local grocer, using their supply chain they are providing fresh veg and using the kitchen to make pies and ready meals. A great example of supporting those who have supported them in the past and safeguarding rural jobs within their local community.

However, there were a lot of businesses big and small alike that due to the nature of their trade and industry had to close their doors and where possible, work from home, resulting in a significant downturn in business activity as the economy ground to a halt. Some of this was inflicted upon us by government, however, some of this could be put down to grief and loss. Yes, I do appreciate we are in a pandemic and many people are sick and dying, however it can be agreed that there has been a malaise within the marketplace. As we enter our 6th. week of lockdown, it can be said during this time I have seen and heard many examples of business people grieving the loss of business. I would like to think I know a little or to about grief having lost my business partner, wife and mother of my children 10 years ago and the impact it can have on you. What I have identified having spoken to a lot of likeminded people during this business hiatus, are very similar to those behaviors outlined in The Kübler-Ross model, better known as the five stages of grief. The model was first introduced by Swiss-American psychiatrist [Elisabeth Kübler-Ross](#) in her 1969 book [On Death and Dying](#), which postulates that terminally ill patients experience a range of emotions prior to death, or that people who have recently lost a loved one will experience the same emotions.

Sign Post – 5 Stages of Grief

The stages of grief and mourning are experienced daily in all walks of life and they can differ from one person to the next it is not a linear process nor does it occur in a particular order but it can manifest itself in different intensities. We generally move through all the stages at different rates until we become accepting of our loss, death. Let's look at this practically, the death we are mourning is the old established ways that we are accustomed to live and work. However it has been widely agreed that this is probably the reset that we as a society needed to recalibrate what is important and vital to our health and well-being as a civilization. The pain we are experiencing is change. Lets look at the 5 stages in more detail to get a better understanding where you may be in the process.

Denial: This is a very isolationary behavior and was very prominent at the outset of the pandemic; *COVID-19 is not going to be that bad, this is not going to impact us, we can work from home.*

Anger: This is the frustration stage; *What Lockdown?! No the government can't do this! What's going to happen to me and my business? What are the government going to do about supporting me? Where's that petition?* There was a lot of angry people, all you had to do was go on to social media to get a flavor of the anger and frustration that was being felt across the landscape.

Bargaining: This is a line of defence against the emotions of grief. It helps one postpone the sadness, confusion or hurt. At this stage people were blaming the government for not doing this or that; *Do I really need to stay at home? Why can't I just go out, my needs are essential?*

Depression: This is where the sadness kicks in and the realization of the loss or potential loss. The feeling of despondency of what you have built and developed grinding to a halt. The regret and sorrow that things that were planned have been cancelled or postponed; *Ah well what am I going to do? Nothing! Let's open another bottle of wine? Which episode is this? By the way, what day is this?*

Acceptance: This is the stage of Realization and it differs from one person to the next, this is where one accepts what has happened and now begins to think about a way forward; *How can I get back to work? What do we as a business need to do to get back in the game?*

I don't mean to be flippant, but these were all common thoughts and emotions that were experienced across the business landscape and to be honest, some are still working their way through the stages. As stated above, grief and bereavement are all something we will experience within our lifetime, some sooner than others. The best thing to do is accept it for what it is, ride the waves of emotions and let it feed you until it has passed. Whatever you do, do not fight against it as it will only take longer to overcome.

Over the past 6 weeks, I have spoken to many owners and senior people in SME's as I deal with them through my work as a customer, supplier and business confidant and I have witnessed all of these stages in people and their businesses. I have also seen how some have gone through the whole process and in turn have accepted the situation, assessed their marketplace and adapted their business model to get back to work and face the new challenge with a fresh approach to the needs of the market and continue their path towards their business goals.

No one said it was going to be easy, being your own boss is always going to be full of challenges and obstacles along the way. You just need to meet these challenges face on as they arise and learn from the process, it is something that they call experience.
Best of Luck.