

Tips for Moving Forward in the “New Normal”

BY JIM CATANZARO
Business Chair
and JUSTIN FURROW
Labor and Employment Chair

The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly changed our world, and people continue to discuss adjusting to a “new normal.” We launched our new Chambliss website in the weeks before the pandemic with a focus on how Chambliss has evolved with our clients over our 130+ year history. Now with the impact of COVID-19, we are all rapidly evolving to meet the needs of employees, clients, customers, and families around the world. As businesses continue to ramp up and return to full production, many still are wondering if they are doing things the “right way” or if there is even such a thing. Our firm continues to monitor new and emerging legislation and guidelines affecting businesses and nonprofits, which seem to change daily. At this stage, here are some helpful tips for blunting the continued impact of COVID-19 and ways to hopefully thrive in the second half of 2020.

Stay informed.

The flow of information has been somewhat difficult to manage. Identify trusted sources and monitor them regularly, whether it be your normal news site, a good blog, or your favorite law firm’s website. Before making important business decisions, verify the information with your advisors. Remember, knowledge is power.

For example, did you hear about the EEOC’s guidance on employee temperature checks? (Hint: you can check employee temperatures now.) What about the IRS’s announcement on deductions for expenses paid with Payroll Protection Program loan proceeds? (They may not be deductible as originally expected.) These are just two examples of the myriad developments that could significantly impact your operations.

Be strategic with financial relief.

If you sought financial relief, beware



Jim Catanzaro



Justin Furrow

of key guidelines to avoid unforeseen consequences. For example, loans under the Paycheck Protection Program can be fully forgiven, but only if you meet all of the statutorily required criteria, including generally maintaining headcount, maintaining employee compensation levels, and using the loan proceeds only on payroll and other permissible expenses. Not appropriately dotting every “I” and crossing every “T” could be significantly detrimental from a financial standpoint.

Focus on perhaps your biggest asset – your people.

Many are afraid and concerned about the future. Implement a plan that

conveys a measured approach to your staff, and make sure that everyone adheres to your protocols. Continue to monitor guidance from the CDC and OSHA, and take care to maintain a clean and healthy workplace. Be honest and forthright in communicating your plans and vision to create employee “buy-in.” Ensure that employees continue to feel motivated and engaged, even those that are still working remotely.

Review your contracts.

Know your rights and obligations under your major agreements. Are there mechanisms that might allow you to terminate a contract early if necessary? Are there automatic price or cost increases that you need to try to avoid (or at least account for)? Don’t be caught unaware.

Have fun.

For most of us, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a period of unprecedented stress and uncertainty. And at some point, you probably forgot to have fun. But business leaders need an appropriate balance to maintain a steady hand and lead the business through this crisis while positioning it for success in the future. Mental health is vital in this process. Go for a hike. Play a game of horse with your kids. Jump in a mud puddle. Do something that makes you smile. You’ll be a better leader if you do.

Jim Catanzaro and Justin Furrow co-chair the Chambliss COVID-19 Task Force. Chambliss has also established a COVID-19 Insight Center to help clients and community members manage their personal lives and businesses in light of the recent challenges posed by the novel virus. We will continue to monitor and provide updates on legislation and other legal implications related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please refer to the insight center on our website for the latest legal alerts, articles, and other resources – chamblisslaw.com.