

## EPISODE 1: How Do We Get Restarted?

### Podcast Transcription

#### Your Host:

David Bundy | President & CEO, Dean Dorton

Welcome to Dean Dorton's first official podcast. While we have been planning to launch a podcast this summer, we find ourselves wanting to share more of our thoughts and insights with you. We recognize these times are pressing for all of us, so we want to do anything we can do to provide guidance for you and your company.

With that, I want to give you a short background about who you are hearing from today. My name is David Bundy and I am the President and CEO of Dean Dorton, one of the largest certified public accounting and business advisory firms in the Southeast. I've spent more than 30 years of my career working in public accounting and private industry, first as an auditor then transitioning to a consultant. I've helped many companies from small nonprofits to large corporations and medical groups through mergers and acquisitions, strategic planning, and operational assessments and development of operational improvement plans. Today I would like to give you some thoughts around the topic that if we all know we will get through this as a society—how do we get restarted?

To say that we are in unprecedented times in our country is as large an understatement as could be shared. Today we are doing what we can to prevent the spread of a virus that is still not completely understood. We do know that our best course of action is to practice social distancing. The models of the impact of this action are updated daily and there is hope that for now we are having a positive impact on the spread.

Although we know there is a lot more work to do to completely eliminate the impact of COVID-19, we are starting to believe that at some point the social distancing measures we are undertaking can begin to ease. So it is probably time to at least begin the process of asking the question, "What do we do then?" The social distancing measures taken have impacted every business in our economy. Many have had to close completely, while others have seen a dramatic decrease in revenue. Over 16 million people have been laid off or furloughed in the last three weeks alone as companies desperately try to survive.

To many of us, we are having flashbacks to 2008 and the massive recession that hit and kept our economy struggling for many years. We take our experiences from 12 years ago and begin to apply that to our situation today. Everything I have read, though, indicates that

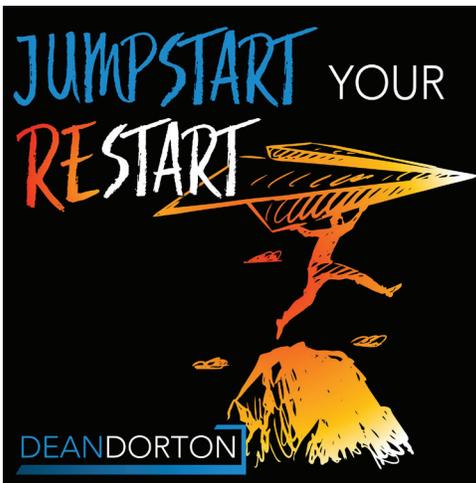
may not be the best thing to do. Many economists point out that just eight weeks ago our economy was as strong as it has ever been. There were very little issues with any of the underlying economic forces. So, they look at the economic impact of COVID-19 as a natural disaster. Something that hits the economy, has an impact, but then the economy can recover faster. There are numerous predictions on when the economy fully recovers, from four quarters to seven quarters, to possibly more. But those predictions are for full recovery. The growth from where we are today will start much sooner than that. Which means your company, whether you faced a complete shut down or a decrease in staffing, will need to be prepared to re-engage in the economy.

So although our first priority remains doing what we can to stop the spread of the virus, I do not think it is too early to begin asking what you should do to restart your company. Let me make my second very obvious statement—you have no playbook to follow for advice on how to do this. As I have considered what should be done, I cannot help but to think about a scene from the 1995 movie, *Apollo 13*. In a pivotal point in the movie, astronaut Ken Mattingly, played by Gary Sinise, had to develop the correct sequence the *Apollo 13* crew had to follow to restart their command module. He had no room for error and failure on his part meant the lives of the crew.

I don't believe any of us are facing such a life or death situation and I believe the margin of error in restarting a business is much greater than what was faced during the *Apollo 13* mission. However, I believe we can develop a sequence in restarting that will help us do so more effectively. Not all of these steps may apply to your situation, but I believe they should all be considered.

Here are some ideas:

1. Re-condition your thought process. This may sound like a random place to start, but one I believe may be the one that is most crucial to your post pandemic success. The economic impact from COVID-19 has come at us hard and fast. Many businesses correctly shifted quickly to survival mode. However, it is hard to think about restarting your company and to do so well if you continue to think through things in a survival mode. Allow yourself to begin to see past where we are today so you can see clearly what steps you should take to restart.



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2. Take time to review your mission. This is a step you probably have not considered and may be one you do not have to take, but hear me out on this one. Each successful company has a purpose and mission—they have a purpose in our economy. With all of the changes we are facing, I believe it is a good time to just check to make sure that purpose and mission are still valid. Keep in mind that we are not only facing an unusual time today, we have to begin to anticipate how things will work after the social distancing measures all ease. This step can also serve as a way to jumpstart your thinking about restarting, and it may allow you to see some changes that you can make to allow you more success in the future.
  3. Review your processes. Over the last six weeks we have all had the opportunity to see how our organizations react under an extremely stressful event. How quickly were you able to shift support operations? How easily were you able to shift ordering supplies, processing accounting transactions, billing, collecting, etc.? I believe you should never waste a hardship. Take a hard look to see if there are some efficiencies you can gain by the way you do things. It is possible that where you found obstacles in your shifting of workloads, may be an inefficiency that you can address? In addition, we do need to be aware that we may be called to go through this process again. How ready will you be if something like this were to re-occur?
  4. Develop a short-term plan. No one believes that once our social distancing restrictions are lifted that the economy will be able to bounce right back. That same understanding should also be applied to your operations. You will not be able to flip a switch and be fully operational once you get the green light to start. I believe you should begin to develop a short-term plan (six to nine months) that will help guide you through a restart phase. The plan should consider things such as when you anticipate your revenue levels will begin to grow, what operational support you might need to produce those revenue levels, when you bring employees back and who you bring back, any changes you want to make—whether that be capital improvements or process improvements. The plan should be as detailed as you can make it. Once developed, your short term plan will help you understand your timeline for the restart of your business.
  5. Employees. Although your employee re-engagement will be part of your short-term plan, it is important enough I wanted to discuss that in more detail. Whether employees have been working at home and you need to bring them back to the office, or you have had to reduce your staffing levels and need to re-hire, you should develop a plan quickly to bring back employees. You should have a plan that directs you to know who to hire and when, based upon the short-term plan you developed. Also, keep in mind that for your short-term restart phase, your employees can serve in different roles. For example, perhaps they begin to contact customers to let them know when you are ready to serve them. That is probably was not part of their pre-pandemic job duties, but it is a short-term duty that they can serve now. They also may need to wear multiple hats during the restart and their ability to do that should be considered when you are bringing your employees back. Timing for this is critical. Hiring good employees back as soon as you can handle it financially may give you a competitive advantage down the road.
  6. Communication. When you begin to restart, your customers should know this. Part of your short-term plan should be how you will let your customers know you are back in business. Whether you use a digital medium, print, or direct messaging through text or phone—you need a plan to get the word out.
  7. Strategy. Similar to some of our earlier phases, this one may sound out of place. But we need to recognize the world may be different six months down the road. You should begin to develop a strategy that allows you to navigate through the changes. Once your restart has been successful, I believe you may find it will be time to adjust your long-term strategy.
- I am sure there are several other points to consider as you restart. And I recognize that each industry will have its own nuances to consider. But the companies who restart the most efficiently and most effectively will be the companies who are the most successful post pandemic.