

Living in a Digital World

The Challenges of 2020 Will Make Us Stronger

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2020 started off with a bang. The world economy was strong, and manufacturing showed signs of strength in the New Year. Our concerns were keeping up with customer demands, finding talented and dependable employees, and where to invest in equipment and technology to improve our businesses.

A few months later, a virus would consume every ounce of our time. From initial medical warnings and concern, we shifted to massive societal shutdowns, widespread layoffs, and an economic and social landscape that may not look the same for months or years to come.

While everyone dealt with the reality of COVID-19 - modified work spaces, PPE, cleaning procedures and social distancing - all while trying to maintain a consistent workflow, no one could have imagined how May 2020 would end, particularly in the Minneapolis/Saint Paul area.

What happened in Minneapolis sent shockwaves across the globe and dealt another unexpected blow to what we hoped and prayed would be a return to normalcy, calmness, and productivity. Whether it's discussing societal impacts on your workforce or physically cleaning up the charred remains of what was a burgeoning business, none of this made being a business owner, manager, employee, vendor, or customer easier.

IMPACT OF DIGITAL MANUFACTURING

This issue's focus is on digital manufacturing. Not a soul on the planet would have imagined just 20 years ago what the year 2020 would look like from a technology standpoint. The digital transformation has created the largest manufacturers on the globe, changed how nearly every business transaction is completed, and how nearly all manufacturers produce. When COVID-19 “infected” the world, companies across the globe adopted additional digital platforms to allow work-from-home opportunities, modified workspaces to accommodate social distancing, and modified equipment to pivot immediately to PPE products. Twenty years ago, some of this wasn't possible and if so, would have taken exponentially longer to implement.

Regarding the societal impacts of the digital space, the world has changed with the invention of social media and the handheld device. We have witnessed miracles on film which prior to social media would have gone unnoticed. You can find the most heart-warming videos and stories bringing an immediate smile to your face and tear to your eye. In contrast, it's opened up the world to dark realities across the globe many of us cannot imagine. While some days I have my doubts, I pray these mediums bring dramatic positive change across the world.

As I tend to do in my reflections in these articles, it comes back to what direct impact we can have as business owners, managers, and employees.

From a business perspective, I believe the digital world has created an “adapt or die” scenario. The impact of technology on our shops can increase productivity tenfold with little increase in human capital, but also drive pricing below what used to be considered competitive. It's opened up a global marketplace for what used to be a local supply chain. It's created competitors you never thought you had, but allowed you to compete with those you never imagined.

From a personal perspective, the digital transformation has pushed me to become more relational than ever. We have the ability to be connected 24/7 and can chose to hear whichever voices we want. The media has realized a digitally-connected populous reacts to sensational stories and constant conflict. The opportunity to live in an echo chamber is easier than ever and it's an awful place to be.

My ask to our members, readers, and peers is this. First, put the phone down and enjoy the world around you. Every day is a gift. Don't take it for granted. Second, continue to work as hard as you can to make your workplace enjoyable and profitable. From the entry level to the corner office, everyone has an impact on the business and the country needs you. Third, take a step out of your comfort zone. Have a conversation. Ask a question. Listen. Volunteer. Donate. Not where you do on a weekly basis, but where you've never been before or are afraid to go. I bet it's not as bad as you think.

God bless. 