

Sustaining Your Business: Timeline

If you have decided to sustain your business while you are deployed, it is important to begin training your staff (or the person who will handle your responsibilities) as soon as possible so they are prepared to take over quickly. Once you do find out you will be deployed, it is time to turn to your timeline and begin implementing your deployment plan.

Your timeline will vary depending on the size and complexity of your business, but it should be based upon the amount of time prior to deployment you will need to transfer your business responsibilities to someone else, handle all legal and financial matters, ensure your business is covered for the next year without you, and make sure your investment is secure while you are gone.

Your timeline should be comprehensive and include the following:

- ◆ Amount of time prior to deployment that you will want to begin handing over operations. If you are bringing someone in who does not normally work for you, this includes the first day they will begin working and the first day they will handle the business without you. The more prepared you and your employees are to implement your deployment plan, the less time you will need for the transfer of responsibilities.
- ◆ When you will notify employees, investors, clients, and other key stakeholders of your deployment. Below is a list of people you will need to get in touch with and how soon you should notify them. Make a note of the types of people with whom you interact regularly and add them to this list.
- ◆ Frequency of updates you expect your manager or person in charge to contact you with whether over the phone or by email (if you have Internet access while you are deployed) to keep your aware of the business activity
- ◆ Transition period when you return including how long you plan to take before coming back to your business fulltime. Do not assume you will jump back in right away. Understand the need to spend time with your family, readjust to being home, and get caught up with your business. Remember that your business will change while you are gone, and your employees will need to fill you in when you return.

Employees: Employees should be told as early as possible that you will be deployed and that the deployment plan will go into effect, especially if their specific jobs or day-to-day tasks will change as a result of your deployment. You should review your plan with employees and go over any training that is especially important for the smooth operation of your business while you are gone.

Customers: If your business will not be disrupted and your customers will not otherwise notice any difference in service when you are deployed, it is not necessary to notify them right away. It may cause unnecessary uncertainty and lead some customers to take their business elsewhere. Do notify customers right away if their status or business with you will be at all affected by your deployment. Regardless of when you notify customers, always assure them that they will receive the same quality of service when you are deployed that they have always received.

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Suppliers: Let your suppliers know that you will be deployed and provide them with the name and contact information of the person authorized to handle orders, deliveries, and payments while you are gone. If your absence will affect the amount of supplies you will be ordering, let your suppliers know and go over all changes with them before you leave.

Service Providers: Notify your service providers and provide them with the name and contact information of the person or persons authorized to act on your behalf while you are gone. This includes the person responsible for signing checks, overseeing services, and filing claims if they arise.

Banks and credit card companies: Notify your credit card companies and bank to find out what you must do to assign authorization to another person to access your accounts. You may need to add their name to accounts, get a company credit card in their name, or just give permission for them to access the accounts.

Lenders: If you are concerned with your ability to pay off any outstanding business loans at their current rates while you are gone, work with your lender to examine your options. Changing the structure of the loan may be one option, or your lender may be flexible in lowering rates or deferring payments. Speak to your financial advisors to find the best solution for you.

Because you never know how long you will have between the time when you receive your orders and when you actually deploy, it is important that your timeline be flexible and accommodate deployments that give you advance warning and those that occur without warning, such as in the case of natural disaster or emergencies. Because you may have little to no time to implement your plan and have a smooth transition, your staff and all other affected stakeholders should be aware of the plan and knowledgeable of their responsibilities. You can also save time by authorizing someone you trust to handle accounts and other important issues before you deploy. This will allow customers, suppliers, and others to get to know that person ahead of time and build up a level of trust before you ever leave.