

MITIGATE BUSINESS RISK & INCREASE EMPLOYEE SAFETY VIA AN 'EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN'

OVERVIEW

Mitigating risk is a fundamental part of good business and leadership practices. When we act proactively to address potential challenges and or situations which could harm our business we are acting in a manner which can help us stave off or lessen moments which may be critical in nature. Protecting ourselves from future situations is important, which is why all business owners and people in leadership must consider implementing an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) within their operations.

Given the events of 2020 its understandable for businesses and their employees to be on edge about the unknowns ahead of us. ERP allow us to plan accordingly therefore should an unexpected event unfold, like a health emergency or civil disturbance, we're prepared to handle the situation with clearly defined processes which our leaders and employees alike are trained on. It's always better to plan and have the plan never go into action than to be unprepared and regret it later on.

PROCRASTINATION IS RISK BASED GAMBLING

How many times have we waited too long to address a task to later learn our procrastination ended up creating more work and heartache in the end.

This is a daily experience for many businesses pushing off activities which may on the surface seem unimportant or trivial in the moment but lack thereof in the wrong circumstances creates havoc on the business' leaders and employees alike. Havoc also often brings with it a loss of time and funds furthering the problem.

Enter the Emergency Response Plan (ERP); also referred to as Emergency Action Plan (EAP).

If you've ever seen an ERP or been a part of the team putting one together, you know firsthand this exercise is no walk in the park. A thorough and well-rounded ERP can easily exceed 60 pages in length, whereas larger corporations plans can surpass 200 pages, covering everything from natural disaster planning to emergency health services and of course the latest business challenge - pandemics. Many also include Continuity of Operations Plan (COOPs) which address situations when employees can't come to the office to perform their jobs but the company must continue it's operations.

Why is it so many companies, especially companies under 100 employees, don't have an ERP in place? Not only do they not have a formal document and list of procedures to rely on when the sky falls, little to none of their employees have ever been trained in what to do should an emergency occur.



This is business gambling at its finest hour. Without a plan in place we are accepting an incredible amount of unnecessary risk.

Companies choose to put off business planning, which includes ERP related procedures and documentation most commonly because ‘they didn’t think they needed it’. Other reasons why companies don’t have an ERP in place is they didn’t know they need one or they’re fire fighting other business needs which require immediate attention. Running an organization this way means we’re focused on trying to keep our head above water without forethought on the future.

Whatever the reason may be which has led an organization to push off implementing an ERP just know this – should you encounter an emergency which puts your business, operations, employees or facility in crisis mode, know that your company and or its directors could be held accountable for a lack of planning or action – especially if lives are at risk.

If you’re in a position where you don’t have an ERP for your company and you’ve yet to experience an emergency or critical situation at work consider yourself lucky.

GET AHEAD WITH PROACTIVE MEASURES

Get your ERP underway following these six steps:

1. Get an emergency response plan in place **IMMEDIATELY**; even if the plan you put in place initially is a couple pages worth of emergency preparedness, you’ll still be better off than a company that has nothing (Bare minimum requirements of an ERP should include facility evacuation, emergency health, utility dangers and or heavy equipment/ chemical hazard protocols should they apply)



2. Make the investment and hire a company or external person to walk you through the development of a full Emergency Response Plan. It's a relatively inexpensive exercise which brings about a welcomed piece of mind, one your owner(s), Board and or employees will appreciate; when we look out for the wellbeing of those around us we're leading at an optimum level while protecting our investments
3. Create an 'Emergency Team' within your company which is comprised of staff assigned to specific tasks should an emergency occur
4. Share your plan with your employees and document the discussion [have your employees sign off confirming the discussion occurred] and file this within their employee files
5. Train your employees on the plan, including a proactive drill to simulate a crisis to see how the plan works in a simulated environment; do these drills annually and have your employees and or Emergency Team sign off on the activity; the ERP training should also be included in every new employees' onboarding process
6. Create a place employees can easily access the ERP both electronically and in person via a paper binder of sorts

Given the events of 2020 its understandable for businesses and their employees to be on edge about the unknowns ahead of us. Planning ahead of time for possible risks reduces our likelihood that risk develops into a situation which puts our employees or the company in danger. It's always better to plan and have the plan never go into action than to be unprepared and regret it later on.



EMERGENCY LEARNING LESSONS

We were contacted by a medtech company to help create their first ERP as they had just experienced an emergency situation where an employee, we'll call her Tina, fainted at the office in a common area. Another employee, let's call him Josh, found her conscious but noticeably shaken up and still on the ground. Josh stayed by Tina's side and called the paramedics. He stayed with her, providing support and comfort until the paramedics arrived; long and short Tina turned out to be okay, she had fainted due to exhaustion and overheating.

A couple months later I asked the company's VP of Operations about the outcome of the situation to which she shared, "we were lucky Josh of all people found her, Josh was an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) when he was in college and jumped right into action. If it had been anyone else, including me, we would have been unprepared not knowing what to do. We had no plan in place whatsoever to deal with a situation like this. Needless to say we're lucky things ended without further incident.

Shortly thereafter I learned both Tina and Josh were now officially leading the company's emergency preparation team.

This company got a wakeup call – they were lucky the situation wasn't any worse. Prior to this incident they had no plan in place, no process to deal with crisis' or emergency situations. Their business and employees were left to chance in dealing with critical moments, moments which can be the difference between life and death.

As Denis Waitley says, "Expect the best, plan for the worst, and prepare to be surprised."



CONCLUSION

There are some things we just shouldn't procrastinate on, putting an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) in place isn't one of them. Don't wait until it's too late to get an ERP in place, start immediately even if your initial plan is only a couple pages worth of emergency preparedness. The ERP acts as a guide providing step by step procedures for emergency situations for situations like facility evacuation, emergency health and utility dangers protocols; include heavy equipment/chemical hazard protocols should they apply. Not having an ERP in place means you and your company are accepting a potentially large amount of risk, risk which isn't necessary.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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As the founder and managing director of Square-1 Engineering, a life sciences consulting firm, Travis has spent the last 15 years of his career working in Orange County, CA's medical device industry providing end to end technical project services in R&D, regulatory compliance, operations through to product obsolescence.

ABOUT DEVICEALLIANCE

DeviceAlliance is the only multi-disciplinary, non-profit, professionals' association serving the medical device industry in Orange County, CA. We strive to be the one-stop-shop at the center of the medical device ecosystem helping drive career development, community collaboration and innovation for all device professionals in Orange County, CA. We offer engaging educational programs, mentoring, collaborative events, knowledge sharing and much more.

As a result we're the ideal place to help support medical device professionals, of all backgrounds and educational disciplines, as they formulate start-ups, expand market share for a Fortune 500 corporation or grow their individual careers.

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