

HOW I DID IT

How I led my company into **turning a profit** during a crisis

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Sebastian Hamsant, the CEO of Hambert Content, is among the few business leaders who have led their companies to positive results in the middle of the increasingly volatile pandemic that nearly collapsed economies globally.

Hamsant led the content producer to an available 144 per cent increase in pre-tax profits over the \$170M million realized in 2019. Hired in 2008 as the group CEO, the engineer has led the company to three consecutive positive annual growth turns with a number of product innovations that have made the firm a market leader in the sector. Hamsant shares some of his leadership strategy tips that have kept the company afloat.

What is the first thing you do when faced with a crisis that could cripple the business?

Key thing is not to panic. You are the leader of not only the business, but also the employees who look up to you for direction. It is important for you as a leader to quickly identify what will be the impact of the crisis to the business and to your employees. This will help you understand what actions to take. For instance, when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, many business leaders rushed to reduce the headcount, but we did not, because it is our employees are our main asset, and I realized in the medium and the long term I would have jeopardized the operations of the company and it would cost more than what we would have saved. We then reached a consensus with employees and it was a win-win for all of us. If you panic, then you will make wrong decisions that will come later to haunt you.

Why do businesses fail or succeed during a crisis?

What defines a company is the culture and its values. During a crisis they become important. When everything is fine and business is doing well, no one bothers about the values and the culture of the organization. But when the unprecedented happens, it's when a business relies heavily on its values. When we talk about team work then this is the time it must come to the fore front. When we talk about employee-enthusiasm, then the decision you make will be guided by these values.

Winston Churchill said that we should never let a crisis go to waste. What has the pandemic taught you?



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A crisis is like a final exam, but this time around you have no timetable to help you prepare. It pushes you down the deep sea and you must find your way to the shore where your employees are waiting for you to guide them through the storm. It reformed me as a thinker and a risk taker. It strengthened my decision-making skills. As a business leader, this is the time you will recognize that a company is not a democracy. That no one votes for a certain decision and it is you and your skill. Even though you will listen to advice here and there, ultimately the last call is yours to make and the future of the business is in your hands. A crisis will also teach you as a leader the need to communicate with your team members explaining why you have taken such a decision and why they should join you.

Would you recommend that a leader first heads different departments before reaching the apex?

Yes. The beauty about this is that you will recognize how vital each department is to the business. You will be able to identify what is adding a certain department and the remedy. A leader who has grown through the ranks will have a better understanding of the job and he will be in a better position to develop each department. As a leader, before you make decisions affecting a department, you will ask yourself what it is you will improve in that department by taking the action, and if it aligns with your vision. Very thing if offered to take up a spot as a leader is to always ask yourself "How will I improve this department if I am given the chance?" If there is nothing to improve then decline the offer.

Why should companies be innovative?

A company that does not innovate will die. Innovation is not for tech companies alone. Each company must come up with an innovation that improves their product or service, if you fail to invest in innovation, you are investing in failure. Innovation means that you are forward thinking, that you are anticipating market changes while observing current trends. It also means you are preparing for the future. Innovation is akin to being in the heart of your customer; it is identifying a challenge your customers grapple with and quickly coming with an innovative product to beat the hands. A company that keeps on churning new and quality innovative product or service will always remain ahead of the rest. At Hambert Content we have a department of innovation that is fully funded to keep us ahead of our competition in terms of delivering quality to our customers. That is how we have survived.