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## We Have Always Overcome Challenges with Innovation, and This Time Will be no Different

“It was an emotional day for me,” said one of my staff members in a shocked voice “I was not ready for hearing the fear in their voices.” She was referring to the calls she had made to check on our local business owners facing the Covid-19 situation. “Not ready” that is how our businesses felt and how we all felt. How could we have been prepared for this? There is no roadmap. Even the business planners out there who had their emergency plan tied up perfectly realized that this scenario was not in their plans. We’ve never faced anything like this before in our community and it can be frightening. I realize the unprecedented difficulty our business members are facing. The entire Chamber Board and staff members understand the sudden abrupt stop that was put on your business activity without any warning while you were thriving and entering what was going to be a promising tourism/Spring season. Whether you poured all your life savings into a business start-up or you have been running an established business for years, the shock is the first thing we need to recover from.

Once the brunt of the initial shock subsides, we need to start to “build the bridge as we walk on it.” Planning for solutions in an uncertain and fluid situation can be maddening. That is why implementing a daily discipline of separating the urgent tasks from the important tasks should be a first step. Also, we need to believe one thing that a good friend of mine, who is a teacher regularly tells her students “every problem comes with its solution.” Formulate a plan for yourself and list what you can control in your business and act within that cone of certainty to build confidence that you can get through this. The same way our immune system regroups all its antibodies to fight a threat, the private sector is uniquely and strongly positioned to provide innovative solutions in times of crisis. Our community is no different. Consider the new and greatly needed hand sanitizer produced by the [St. Augustine Distillery](#) and given to first responders. The two new products created locally by [Menu Designs & Dobbs Global Sourcing](#); a protective face shield and a protective face shield hat, both needed by our health care workers. It is during these difficult times that creativity flows and innovation

thrives. It is also a time when collaboration is a must as we hear every leader say, “we are all in this together.” Solidarity fuels resiliency.

While some businesses find themselves in the hot bed of innovation, others had to temporarily or permanently close due to social distancing guidelines. And with that, over 10 million Americans applied for unemployment in March. Under the CARES Act additional funds have been added to increase benefits to newly unemployed Americans. The CARES Act is an unprecedented and multifaceted stimulus package essential to mitigating the recession we have entered and to keep Americans working. The attractive part of the package is the loans, because they are forgivable if these funds are used for payroll, mortgage interest, rent, utilities and inventory. You can find details and guidance on the SJC Chamber of Commerce [website](#).

Then, there are the essential businesses who are increasing their [hiring](#) to provide services needed. Thank you to our health care workers, our first responders, our janitorial crews and our grocery store employees who are working to keep us fed and safe. There is no doubt that the life we are now living feels strange and fearful. In addition, the unknown of the fall-out once the virus has passed is another question mark weighing heavily on our shoulders. One quote recently attributed to John Lennon that I love is “Everything will be ok in the end. If it’s not okay, It’s not the end.” I must believe that no matter how long it will take, we will be fine. Some of you will use this difficult time to reinvent yourselves, learn a new skill, enter a new career. Entrepreneurs will start another new business in an industry entirely new to them. Companies will have to speed up their hiring process, review their benefits and, for those who didn’t do it before, include working remotely as one of the benefits of work-life balance.

Business owners will need to streamline their employee on-boarding procedures and reduce the amount of time invested in training while still insuring a satisfactory training level outcome. Upskilling employee programs will be considered more heavily as not only an attractive tool for employees but a necessary retention and operation tool for employers.

And finally, the main reason that motivated me to move to this country 20 years ago: The Spirit of Entrepreneurship. That is the one thing that I believe will always prevail in America. You can beat it up, slam it with- you name it- hurricanes,

pandemics, cyber-attacks - it will still find a way to sprout, pollinate and grow and will do that at a faster rate in places where government removes barriers and encourages it to prosper.

Local governments' role in accelerating entrepreneurship and encouraging a diversified economy will be critical for a fast and lasting economic rebound. Entrepreneurs will need to make their financial resilience a priority as they are developing their products or services. Places and online platforms fostering and accelerating the connection between entrepreneurs, connecting minds, ideas, skills and resources will be more critical than ever before. Let's remember that products and services created are the life form of the minds of our dreamers and innovators and that people are the ultimate difference makers.

I would be remiss if I didn't give a shout-out to a passionate group of difference makers: the Chamber Staff. I am blessed to lead an amazing group of professionals whose curiosity, resourcefulness and creativity have found a way to provide critical support to the business community in this uncertain time. Chamber Gang: You never cease to amaze me!

When this is all over, we won't look the same way at teachers, health care workers, remote-work place, real estate, technology, and I believe, chambers of commerce.

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