

campaigns is to admit when mistakes have been made and apologise for them. And whether you are personally responsible or not, the founder must be quick in taking ownership of the situation and dealing with it swiftly and without emotion.

As a founder, it's unlikely you will have the tools to handle if and when a catastrophe hits your business, no matter how thorough the FAQ section is on your website. Planning now and arranging the right protocol can save you reacting negatively in the heat of the moment.

Plan a Q&A in advance which can give you a framework to help inform your answers (and your customers) when something goes wrong. It's important not to sound robotic and these answers will need to be tweaked depending on the issue, but getting the foundations in place will help you if disaster does hit.

Go through all the elements of your business and identify where things can potentially go haywire. Of course, you can't always predict why and when a crisis will hit. Fires, IT issues, breakdowns in supply chains – they are often forgivable if the responses are handled well.

But take The Soap Co, who in a case of mistaken identity was targeted by consumers when news broke it was apparently treating its customers badly, only it wasn't them but a different company entirely. In this instance, the PR team were quick off the mark to alert media to the mistake and a pop-up was created on its website within three hours to explain the situation, halting the backlash.

Recently Jodine Boothby, founder of Gumme – a company that makes teething products for babies – found herself in the middle of a sales nightmare. She realised that overnight her products had been removed from Amazon and Argos following a Which? report that had incorrectly deemed her product unsafe and then reported her to the national press. Luckily Boothby had all of the independent and verified product paperwork ready in her artillery, and took to social media and contacted the businesses directly to prove her innocence.

The above smaller companies were lucky they were able to prove their innocence but, without careful due diligence, your business might not be. It shows that a few hours preparing for a crisis now could save you from horrendous and potentially company-ending damage later.

● *Lucy Werner is founder of The Wern and author of the forthcoming book Hype Yourself: A No-Nonsense DIY PR Toolkit for small businesses.*

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COLIN
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Conservation as a growth industry

The idea of conservation in Africa can be an abstract idea. It is such a big issue and it can be hard to grasp.

Michael Lorentz, a private safari guide, told me that with the pace of the continent's population growth, if nothing changes and new forms of African-centric solutions are not created, it will ultimately be futile: 'Like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic.'

The dangers are many. Poaching represents a profitable trade, especially in impoverished communities. There's also the short-term economic benefit of forestry, and selling off materials for profit. As the population grows, there's more demand domestically for items derived from natural resources, along with new trade relationships externally with other ravenous goods importers around the world.

The short-term benefits of exploiting these resources are real. The most relevant (and existential) question here is how to turn conservation into a growth industry?

Fred Swaniker, founder of the African Leadership University (ALU), has been looking at how a new wave of African entrepreneurs and companies can be empowered to use conservation for upward growth and a business opportunity for themselves. The continent is estimated to grow in population fourfold to nearly three billion people by 2100. And he is planning to identify, develop and connect three million game-changing leaders for Africa by 2060.

The goal is clear: creating an ownership mindset with accountability built-in. 'Today, most African communities are excluded from the conservation agenda,' notes ALU's school of wildlife conservation website. 'We believe that unless African communities feel ownership of wildlife and the natural environment, they will have little incentive to conserve it.' And the issue is made even more

important when you consider that the average African is just under 20 years old.

The idea is to encourage startups, new businesses, greater female involvement and more investment centred around conservation. At a recent business of conservation forum in Rwanda, Swaniker suggested growth sectors in any form of business (like technology or healthcare) have similar characteristics: they have an enabling environment in terms of law and policy that prioritises growth; they have a magnetic appeal towards the best and brightest talents of a nation; they also generate significant revenue, both for business founders as well as



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tax revenue for the country or city. So why not look at conservation the same way we do with other hyper growth and profit-generating industries?

One part of this plan is to create a new generation of hospitality entrepreneurs and participants in the economy of conservation-led travel. Beks Ndlovu is the personification of what ALU and other programmes are trying to replicate in the coming years. Born in the small rural village of Lupane on the outskirts of Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park, he has built an entrepreneurial career that grew from ecology and guiding to the African Bush Camps – a multi-lodge business based in Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The company, rooted in hospitality and sustainable tourism, donates profits from its safaris back into the local communities. Through its foundation, it also supports healthcare, a local primary and secondary school, and creates jobs for guides and other staff members. Importantly, the company also brings capital

from tourists into Zimbabwe – an economy that desperately needs investment inflows amid current volatility.

While bush camps require a lot of capital, architecture and operations costs to do it effectively, one way for someone to create a business based on conservation is through becoming a private guide. This approach, says Lorentz, the private guide, requires business and marketing know-how, but not a lot of overheads.

Ndlovu says the development of conservation-minded hospitality creates a network of job opportunities and provides local communities with a reason to conserve their surroundings as they will have a real return for their efforts. 'Education is needed to showcase the bigger picture and invite more role models into the equation,' he says. 'When the economic opportunities are extended to a broader scope of players, everyone wins.'

The recipe for change comes down to creating systems of incentives for founders, and realigning short-term thinking around poaching or predatory farming into longer-term and sustainable thinking.

Conservation is a nascent industry for startups in Africa and, as ALU trains the next generation of business-minded conservationists, there will surely be a surge. Some of the early innovators include: Tanzania's Green Charcoal, which sources other abundant, otherwise discarded agricultural waste such as coffee husks, maize, corn cobs and rice husks to make a briquette for cooking; and OBRI Tanzania, a farming company that makes healthier and more affordable cooking oils, from sunflowers, replacing oils that would have had to be imported from overseas.

Also core to the ALU equation is developing African-centric solutions, as opposed to retrofitting Western solutions as a one-size-fits-all. Ndlovu – a perfect example of the bottom-up and Africa-centric entrepreneurial vision – says it is essential to elevate leaders that have lived and experienced the issues first-hand. 'Without recognising African cultures, social structures, and dynamics, viable solutions will never really be found,' he says.

● Colin Nagy is head of strategy at global advertising agency Fred & Farid.

BOOK EXTRACT

Why the war metaphor is bad for business

In wing tsun, an ancient style of kung fu, fighting should be avoided at all costs. If that isn't possible, you must neutralise your opponent quickly with simple and practical moves. According to John Vincent, the co-founder of restaurant chain Leon, and Julian Hitch, a wing tsun master, the same should be applied to business. In an extract from their new book, 'Winning Not Fighting', they challenge the widely held assumption that being successful in business requires confrontation, competition and a loser.

S ometime in the early 1970s, the sixth-century BCE Chinese general Sun Tzu was sitting on a cloud in the big commander's tent in the sky when he received a telephone call. It was from his agent in Los Angeles, and it went something like this:

'Sun, baby, how's it goin'? I got great news. Did I say great? It's better than great! Some guys out here have started writing about your book. They've applied it to business and it's gonna be huge!'

'They've applied it to business?' Sun replied. (This is the Oliver Stone biopic version, so it is not historically accurate.) 'I don't understand. My book is about war.'

It turns out that fighting and war become a predominant metaphor for business as a direct result of the work of American business scholars from the mid-1960s and early '70s.

The word 'strategy' itself comes directly from the Greek word *strategia*, meaning 'generalship' or 'pertaining to the general'. In 1962, Alfred Chandler published *Strategy and Structure*. An analysis of America's industrial multinationals, the chemical company DuPont among them, it was the first book to introduce the concept and the term 'strategy' into business. It was closely followed by Igor Ansoff's *Corporate Strategy* (1965), and Kenneth Andrews's *The Concept of Corporate Strategy* (1971). If you had asked in a meeting before the mid-1960s 'What is our strategy?', the reply would have been 'What is our what??'

All three writers served in World War Two, the conflict interrupting both Chandler's and Ansoff's postgraduate education. All three were influenced by the hierarchical organisation and command structure of the American military. And the thinking they outline is so accepted in business today that we find it very difficult to imagine corporate rhetoric without it.

We talk today about price wars. Project headquarters



The recipe for change comes down to leadership, adjusting the policies and creating systems of incentives for entrepreneurs.

