

Seymour Hotels

INNOVATING THROUGH CRISIS



COVID-19

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It is said 'necessity is the mother of invention'. 2020 has seen many businesses forced into crisis mode, through no fault of their own; needing to innovate rapidly in order to survive.

Although painful, stressful and challenging, innovative mindsets have resulted in businesses successfully pivoting their service or product to a new audience in recent months. One such business is Seymour Hotels. Having prepared to celebrate their centenary celebrations in 2020, their plans were abruptly put on hold as they faced a challenge not experienced since being commandeered by German occupying forces from 1940-45.



Here we share some of the lessons Seymour Hotels have learned as they continue to navigate the Covid crisis.

1) SCAN YOUR SPACE

Keep an eye on what is happening in your industry elsewhere. This can provide a key warning.

During the initial months of the pandemic, when COVID-19 still seemed far away, Seymour Hotels kept an eye on the Trade media and recognised how hospitality was being impacted around the world. Verona's situation in particular was the warning for

the Seymour Hotels team and they used this as a basis for what they should prepare for. When COVID-19 landed on Jersey's shores, Seymour Hotels were already weeks ahead in terms of preparation, having already considered all options to maintain vital cashflow via new income streams and reaching out to local audiences.

2) REGULAR MEETINGS

In a crisis, everything moves quickly. Get ahead with regular meetings to discuss your options.

Holding regular meetings was key for Seymour Hotels during the early stages of the pandemic, ensuring senior management could review and discuss the complete picture, keep on top of updates from Government and track progress of new projects and tasks. The head of each team would then cascade important information through to their direct reports. Before the pandemic, the Senior Team met every two weeks. This changed to three times a week in the first few months of the pandemic as a Covid-19 Emergency Committee. As the crisis reduced during the summer months, the team continued to meet at least once a week.

3) CREATE A PLAN

The plan will change, but it will give you a base to work from. Make sure you plan for the worst-case scenario.

Seymour Hotels already had processes in place to cope with a possible outbreak of Norovirus. This provided a useful foundation for planning, but they mixed this with knowledge coming from hospitality businesses in areas already affected as a basis to plan for the worst possible scenario, while hoping for the best.

Having a member of the leadership team regularly considering the worst scenario and its ramifications became an incredibly important asset as plans were made and reviewed. The Group's companywide intranet was initially used to store and disseminate research materials, posters, notices and plans although this was quickly moved to Microsoft Teams when taken on by the business at the end of March.

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4) THINK LATERALLY

How can you generate new income? Consider what you do now and whether there is an alternative way to offer the same service.

When the hotels couldn't operate as planned, Seymour Hotels:

- Offered their bedrooms as workspaces and accommodation for those needing to isolate or shield.
- Introduced home deliveries – offering meals for the freezer, picnic and BBQ kits for Liberation Day and the summer months as well as takeaways from their restaurants.
- Let car spaces at the Merton, as tourists weren't needing them.
- Mobilised their cleaning and maintenance teams to provide essential and emergency response services to island homes and businesses.
- Offered Zoom classes to their Gym Members, even as membership was paused, in order to maintain connection and limit gym subscription cancellations.
- Outsourced key personnel to help with and transfer skills to other sectors.

5) WORK AS A TEAM TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM

Don't rely on one leader to have all the answers. Define roles, delegate and trust your team.

One of the first actions the Seymours team undertook was to audit all skills within the business. Looking at roles and capacity, projects were allocated amongst the team to maximise productivity: both on the evolved offering as well as managing cancellation and re-booking of existing bookings.

This sped up the creation process so new services could go live quickly. The process also opened the floor to new ideas and solutions from all areas and levels of the business, rather than relying on one person to have all the answers. This, coupled with honesty and clear leadership for final approval on decisions and services, were vital.

7) COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Communication is key. But it's more than talking.

As well as hosting regular meetings with your Senior Team and cascading information, do not underestimate the importance of being visible, listening and thanking your staff for their efforts. Make sure you walk the floor and be available for questions, even if you don't know all the answers yet. Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know".

Listen to your staff when they have an idea or a concern. And keep thanking your team for their hard work. They will remember how you made them feel long after the crisis has passed.

8) LIVE YOUR VALUES

Be authentic in your actions and decisions.

For Seymour Hotels, "family" is at the heart of their values. As a family business, each member of staff is an extension of the family. The Directors know the names of everyone, and no one is anonymous. This gave comfort to many members of staff and also guided the business' actions and decisions as senior team members regularly engaged with all levels of the organisation and were visible throughout.

9) HAVE A DEFAULT MODE OF YES

Say yes, then work out the logistics.

Don't let an opportunity pass you by. If you think it's at all possible say yes, then find the way to make it happen.

10) DON'T JUST AUDIT YOUR COSTS. AUDIT YOUR SKILLS

Consider your team's skills and interests. Are there any hidden talents?

It's important to audit your costs during economic crisis to ensure you're not carrying any unnecessary pressure on vital cashflow. Consider if there are any assets that you can re-deploy to bring in extra income. Seymour Hotels, for example, let out parking spaces at the Merton Hotel which would normally have been used by tourists.

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In addition to a cost audit, don't overlook your team skills which also carry great value. Consider each person's skills and interests. One member of the Seymour Hotels team became a videographer, creating a video outlining their safety measurements to keep guests safe.

Another was identified as a skilled illustrator who (prior to collateral issued by Gov.je) created posters, notices and signage for internal use as well as for guest and social media purposes. And each Hotel's Housekeeping Team helped to make masks for all the staff and customers, uniquely using the Seymour Centenary branding and logos.

11) FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL

Consider what you can implement and what you think is best.

If you wait on other organisations to steer your decisions, your response speed will be slowed. Consider what you know, what you think is best and what you can implement quickly and efficiently.

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Jersey acted as quickly as they could but, with evolving and minimal information, there were delays in progress.

Seymour Hotels had to make swift decisions before support packages and advice were announced. Instead of waiting, Seymour Hotels took what they knew from watching the industry in other jurisdictions and approached Government to offer support and advice. They became proactive providers of a solution rather than responding once all the facts were known.

12) SEEK EXTERNAL COUNSEL

Don't be afraid to seek external counsel and support when you need it.

Rather than struggle, seek external support - whether it is a legal or financial matter, a HR query or you need assistance to expand or transform a service. If you're unsure where to go, Jersey Business can offer confidential advice, support and also direct you to specialist skills for your particular needs.

Together we achieve more.

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