

Strategies for Business Resilience in Weather Crises

Sarah Sawyer: Welcome to this week's OK at Work with myself, Sarah Sawyer, my colleague Russell Berger, both attorneys at Offit Kurman, and today we are talking about weather and weather interruptions, which is probably on a lot of our viewers' minds right now with the snowstorm ice storm, fill in the blank.

Winter weather event that has been going on for a lot of the country. Obviously that's happening for us right now. But also, there's always a lot of different natural disasters that can be impacting business and employees throughout the year, whether it be heat or hurricanes, tornadoes, whatever, type of weather event.

And obviously businesses have to adapt. And especially as it relates to their people and their in-person workers and remote workers. So, Russell, kick us off, what are some things that employers are thinking about right now with these weather events and how should they [00:01:00] plan and accommodate?

Russell Berger: Yeah. Well if you haven't thought about these things yet given that, pretty much the entire eastern half of the country is, covered in snow or ice you might be a little bit late to the game on it. But yeah the general plan. A thought here is you gotta have a plan and you gotta be prepared.

That's the starting point. If you're waiting until the snow's falling to come up with a game plan of what you might do you're a little bit late. So you want to have a plan. You want to know, and, some of this is industry or business specific, but, can you work remotely?

Do you have to shut down? Are you supporting of government where the government buildings might shut down. You can't go in, what are you going to do in all these situations that are outta your control? What degree of control can you gain and how do you exercise that control, to one, make sure your employees are safe.

We don't want anyone getting hurt in these circumstances. And two, the business maintains operational capacity. And some of that might be, and we went through some of this with COVID well, you know what, people should have laptops and they should be able to log in [00:02:00] remotely.

And that would make life a lot easier if we had that. But having those kind of protocols in place and those procedures in place is a, to me, a really important first step.

Sarah Sawyer: And I think it's a really great opportunity for employers also to make a big impression on their employees.

I don't think the people are always thinking about that piece when it comes to these situations, but obviously folks have kids that are home from school. It reminds me, obviously of some of the conversations we had about COVID as far as flexibility and making sure people are safe, making sure they're okay.

Creating a sense of community at work while also maintaining operations and how leaders handle these situations can go a really long way if done right, for, retention and culture and community. Both 'cause obviously you wanna be thinking about both sides and it all impacts the bottom line ultimately, right?

Being prepared, giving thought to those situations ahead of time can really go a long way with employees who are dealing with, power outages, [00:03:00] kids home from school having to maybe leave home and go somewhere, go to a relative's house. They might be dealing with situations where the working conditions are less than ideal for them and they might need to flex their time as far as, when they're able to work.

A lot of that's obviously office workers that we're talking about. I mean It's a whole nother ball of wax when you start talking about the people and the companies where maybe you have emergency services and your employees are out there helping fix power lines or do whatever it is, those types of businesses, it's a whole nother ball of wax there.

But really I think we can't say enough for being prepared because these types of situations are gonna happen no matter where in the country you are. Obviously we're dealing with ice and snow but other parts of the country deal with other things like wildfires or other types of weather events that I mentioned.

So I think you should assume that something disruptive will probably happen at some point to you and your business, and the more prepared you are and the more you've communicated with your employees, put policies in place and have a plan the better off that you'll be, both from an operational perspective and just from a cultural [00:04:00] perspective.

Retention and making a good impression on your employees.

Russell Berger: Yeah. And within that plan 'cause employees are gonna care about this too is you should have a thought about, how you're gonna handle compensation issues. Generally speaking, employees that are exempt and they're on a salary basis, if they work at all during that week, they're gonna get their salary.

So, you have to treat them a little bit differently than non-exempt employees. Or you could treat 'em the same, but the rules are a little bit different. So you wanna make sure that you have a handle on, if I tell people who are, willing to show up and work that we're closed today how are we going to handle the compensation issues around that?

So, that's something that is important to build into the plan as well.

Sarah Sawyer: Yeah, and that's certainly more challenging as it relates to, hourly workers who might be more inclined to wanna be in the office and try to make it there versus folks who can work remotely. So, definitely a really important part of the plan.

I'm glad you noted that, Russell.

Russell Berger: Well, yeah and that's why you see some employers come up with a flexible leave. You've got two days worth of hours you can allocate however, over the course of the year.

So if we're open and there's a [00:05:00] snowstorm but it's not safe for you, just take one of your days.

Sarah Sawyer: Flexibility is definitely key. Well, thanks Russell. We'll see you next time.

Russell Berger: Thanks, Sarah.