



Managing Your Hotel during a Pandemic Crisis
A Checklist for Hotel Owners and Operators
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1. Payroll

- a. When planning layoffs for line staff determine if you wish to short shift your workers and/or lay people off and give those remaining a living wage. Handle this humanely considering the needs of your most loyal workers first.
- b. Have your managers handle shifts especially at the front desk, restaurant, security, maintenance, etc.
- c. Continue to provide health insurance. This will create goodwill in a tough situation and may help save lives.
- d. Allow employees to go on leave especially if they need to take care of relatives and use their vacation time if they choose.
- e. If you have marginal performing employees, now is the time to lay them off and not rehire them when business returns.
- f. Encourage managers to take a day off per week and use up some of their accrued vacation time.
- g. Make sure employees get paid either electronically or printed check.

2. Operating Expenses

- a. Review operating supplies and inventories and limit purchases to essential items.
- b. Review all contracts and determine if able to renegotiate or have vendors cut back on service.
- c. Reevaluate all in room amenities and possibly cut out some non-essential items.
- d. Discontinue stocking of minibars or eliminate them entirely.
- e. Close floors or wings of rooms and adjust temperature for energy efficiency.
- f. Change operating hours of restaurants and room service.
- g. Catch up on preventive maintenance and deep cleaning.

3. Sales and Marketing

- a. **DO NOT LOWER RATES!** This will create a downward spiral in the market and could take years before your rates return to previous levels.
- b. Stay in touch with your customers via email and phone. In times of crisis people will appreciate hearing from people they like and trust.
- c. Be flexible with cancellation policies so you do not burn any bridges.
- d. If closing the hotel, do so for short increments of time such as two weeks to a month and alert all your distribution channels. When business begins to come back you want to make sure you are listed for future bookings.
- e. Get in touch with local accounts that may need rooms in the short term or right after business returns. The accounts to consider include those involved with healthcare, accounting, legal, consulting and other professional services.



- f. Business travelers will likely come back first, followed by leisure and then group, so develop strategies now for your future sales approach.
- g. Discontinue most advertising and hold on to some money for recovery times.
- h. Cutback but maintain a relationship with your public relations and social media team. You may need them if you have a crisis and will want to be active once business reopens.

4. Capital Expenditures

- a. Decide whether to cancel or proceed with renovation projects. Better time to renovate when business is slow but may be hard to mobilize in short term.
- b. Postpone major capital purchases unless necessary.

5. Other

- a. Meet or communicate regularly with your key managers to engage them in decision-making and communicate up to date decisions, to avoid rumors and misinformation from spreading.
- b. Communicate with care and concern to all stakeholders on a regular basis when you have important information to share.
- c. Review your crisis communication plan and make sure everyone is aware of procedures for communicating with stakeholders, the press and the public.
- d. Modify your work from home and flexible work schedule policies to accommodate employee needs as best as possible.
- e. For those serving guests keep people as far apart as practical and make sure proper hygiene protocols are in place and being followed.
- f. Make sure all your systems are securely backed up and do not rely on only one individual to manage. Make sure all systems are secure and review your protocols for people working from home to protect your data and intellectual property.
- g. Donate any unneeded perishable food to employees or local food banks.
- h. Review and enhance your cleaning procedures and document them in a format that you could share with customers when they return.
- i. Demonstrate acts of caring.
- j. Determine what you learned from this crisis to be better equipped to manage the next one.

Stephanie Sonnabend is a 35-year hospitality executive and the former CEO and President of Sonesta Hotels. During her tenure she led the organization through many crises including hurricanes (Andrew and Katrina), terrorist attacks (Egypt) and economic downturns (9/11 and recessions). She led the readiness taskforce for pandemics as well. Today she is CEO of Sonhos Advisors providing strategic consulting and coaching with a special focus on hospitality, real estate, travel and family businesses. She may be reached at sonhosadvisors@gmail.com or 617.293.2725.

