Are You Prepared … For Anything?

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Every fall, I try to get in a horrible zombie movie. During the movie, the characters are never prepared, and are always without a shotgun, a chainsaw and an Oldsmobile Delta-88 with which to escape. How could they possibly survive a zombie apocalypse?

My first stop in just such an event would be Westlake Ace Hardware, complete with their Zombie Preparedness Center [2]. With “I am human” and “Me zombie” sections, they have it all. Zombie defense, zombie proofing and home repair divisions can provide humans with everything we’ll need to survive the zombie apocalypse — make sure to pick up supplies for “removing smells of rot.” And for those that couldn’t evade the zombies, don’t worry — Westlake’s “Delay Decay Experts” are there to help, with a bodily repairs division to help you keep it together. They’re prepared for anything.

Are you prepared? You may not be dealing with the zombie apocalypse, but manufacturers face a variety of threats on a daily basis. With cyber attacks on the rise, the recession that the U.S. is still recovering from and the Thailand flooding that’s disrupting supply chains right now, manufacturers should have their own preparedness kits. Very few, if any, businesses can afford to ignore the possibility that a threat — man-made or natural — will someday impact their manufacturing abilities. There’s also the possibility that one of their key suppliers will be the ones that are impacted.

Oftentimes, surviving the zombie apocalypse is all about strategy — block off all entrances, carry a weapon and avoid zombie bites. Surviving a catastrophic economic meltdown or hurricane involves a bit of strategy as well — a real, documented, at-the-ready plan. A plan does no good if it's just a plan; everyone within the organization needs to be capable of carrying out the strategy if that catastrophic event happens today. No one ever sees the first "walker" coming.

Planning for the most wide-reaching disturbance is often the best strategy. Preparing for the worst leaves a manufacturer with the ability to handle the variety of small-scale problems that will inevitably crop up. Many of the small-scale problems dealt with on a more frequent basis will likely be an element of the larger disaster when it does happen. You'll be able to remain safe when one zombie crosses your path if you plan for the lumbering, hungry mass of them.

In addition to a strategy, manufacturers should also have some level of insurance to cover losses — a loss is never pleasant, but financial losses can be mitigated with insurance. And if a key supplier was to shut down production — have a backup. But make sure that backup doesn't use the same supplier or source as the first.

By minimizing downtime and business interruptions, manufacturers can overcome their own zombie apocalypse, and perhaps even come out stronger on the other side. Focusing on critical business functions could be the perfect way to develop Leaner practices for everyday use.

But even the most prepared organizations can be impacted by disasters, and the U.S. Small Business Administration [3] is available for extra assistance. They provide help for "businesses of all sizes" and provide a current disaster declarations page that lists the events for which they provide assistance. No zombie apocalypse on their list — yet.

Let me know how you prepare for production disruptions (and zombies, of course) at rachel.immel@advantagemedia.com [4] or post a comment below.

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