

COVID-19 – One Dealers' Story

Like many dealers, we are spending many hours on discussing and planning for our future with the COVID-19 virus.

This is uncharted territory for us, but we are doing our best to navigate through the various pitfalls that are around us.

Thank you for advocating on our behalf.

Below are some points that we shared with our leaders this afternoon. I share this to give you a sense inside a dealership on the things we are communicating to our staff. We held a conference call with our Store Managers, who are delivering this in person at the store and will facilitate a question and answer after with the staff.

On a side note, our two top issues with this situation remain:

- 1. Staff reactions*
 - a. Some are VERY concerned and nervous about this virus. This is requiring us to have many discussions and clear communication with our staff. I had no clue what strong reactions there would be to something like this.*
- 2. Customer reactions*
 - a. Most of our turf customers understand the precautions we are taking, however our Ag customers appear to not be taking this threat very seriously at all. Half of our stores report customers that have returned from a cruise a few days prior, refusing to be in self-isolation, thus causing more concerns with our staff.*

Here are some of the notes we shared today with our Leaders:

- Reassured them that the health and safety of our staff and customers are our utmost importance*
- Shared that we will continue to comply with Provincial and Federal mandates that come out and will monitor new changes*
- Shared a partial list as a reminder of what we have done so far to combat this*
 - o Sent communication to each staff member on expectations of practices to prevent the spread of the virus – hygiene etc*
 - o Dealt with quarantine issues with staff and drew a line in the sand for non-essential travel over the March break and ongoing travel*
 - o Determined how to deal with employees who are not feeling safe at work as a result of the virus*
 - Stated that if their position does not allow them to work from home, that they can go on unemployment insurance/government support (most staff cannot work from home, so there are few positions within our organization where this would work)*
 - Have worked with specific cases, one by one to see what accommodations we can make (have made many of them)*
 - o Asked parts team to contact our top 20% of our customers as a start (they aren't as busy with walk in traffic)*
 - Make them aware of our online parts ordering system that we rolled out last year*

- Advise them that we can walk parts out to their truck if they phone in or order online, or we can arrange delivery
 - Encourage our customers to order/anticipate what parts they might need over the next month in the event some type of shut down occurs
 - Made a public announcement on what measures we have taken – social media, website and email blasts
 - Cancelled dealership meetings and special events we have either hosted or were going to be a part of (into April)
 - Lots more
- Want to establish a “rally cry” amongst our staff
 - We need to prepare for spring!
 - We need to be laser focused on preparing our customers for spring planting
 - We need all employees and departments to pull together to support our farming customers - NOW
 - Sample ways to prepare
 - Focus on repairing equipment that is needed for spring. Combines can wait, so redirect techs where possible
 - Focus on spring equipment that we have promised or are working on with our yearly inspections. This means new requests for repairs from customers that did not book a yearly inspection will need to wait till we are finished with our spring commitments.
 - Start working overtime now
 - Need to consider how other departments can help. We want everyone to stay busy. Which means if the parts team is slow, then perhaps they can help some techs with setting up of equipment etc.
- Shared that we do NOT want to participate in layoffs or close a store
 - If the government says only essential businesses are allowed to remain open, we will advocate that we are an essential business so we can continue to prepare for spring planting
 - We are working with WEDA to help us advocate this and for our fruit and veggie customers with regards to migrant workers
 - We need to keep sales flowing through the dealership, but if we can't, then we will look at tough decisions such as laying off. However, our hearts are to prevent this if at all possible.
 - We need to stay engaged and stay positive through this as we prepare for spring. We need to focus on what we can do, and not worry about things we can't control
- Shared new steps we are implementing
 - Send out another reminder about social distancing and proper hygiene to all staff
 - Explained that it is imperative that we do our part to prevent this from spreading. Having a positive case from one of our employees would be disastrous and likely cause us to shut the store down for a period of time and require staff to self-quarantine.
 - Developed a checklist for each store to follow for implementation – with someone double checking to ensure it is in place
 - Asking parts team to begin wearing gloves – to handle boxes, cash etc
 - If picking up pieces of equipment, to hot pressure wash the unit with soap – use gloves for repairs
 - Install new store signage (more clear and direct)

- *Parts displays at the parts counter that establishes the recommended social distancing that the government recommends with our customers (with signs explaining why we have pails of oil where the stools used to be)*
- *Assigning a champion at the store to sanitize the store several times during the day*
- *Store Manager to politely ask customers to follow the protocols where it makes sense*
- *Have product at the parts counter to sanitize counters*
- *Need to manage our expenses differently – now*
 - *Should only spend money on things that prepare us for spring*
 - *Essential spending only*
 - *Asking that all discretionary spending be stopped for the next 4 months (going out for meals etc)*
 - *Hiring will still be done - on a case by case basis*
 - *Pulling back on advertising that is encouraging customers to come into the store. But still focused on used Ag advertising to support spring sales and still advertising to drive business online or phoning in.*
- *Reviewing our spring parts ordering*
 - *Considering ordering a large order of additional stock parts that we would normally have ordered in May, in case our parts depot gets closed and/or the border gets closed*
- *Committed to continue to communicate on a regular basis and explained that even the above information may change at any time*

I am not 100% certain why I am sharing this information, other than feeling called to see if any of this information may be of assistance to other fellow dealers out there. Wish we would have had some reference to go by when developing this. We have contacted one neighboring dealership to compare notes, but otherwise we have been left on our own to figure this out. Would have loved to put all this time and energy towards growing our business, and not trying to keep it all together! But, we shall stay positive and do our best to take care of our employees and customers.