

## Aurora Chamber of Commerce: Business Matters

By Sandra Ferri President & CEO, Aurora Chamber of Commerce

As restrictions continue to lift, businesses open to full capacity and people begin to live life as before, we all wonder, will it really be the way it was pre-pandemic?

So much has changed, in every aspect of our lives.

Our businesses are pumped and ready to serve their clients and customers with a renewed vigor and zest, and we, as consumers, want to support our local businesses and entrepreneurs to ensure that they succeed, because we all know that small business is the engine that drives our economy.

The Ontario Government has renewed their commitment to support small businesses through a grant that will be more broadly accessible and that encompasses those who were not eligible during the last round of grants. For more information and to see if your business qualifies go to: [www.app.grants.gov.on.ca/osbrg](http://www.app.grants.gov.on.ca/osbrg).

With all restrictions slated to be removed by the end of April, we're all clamoring to get back to normal activities and to enjoying life. There are varying degrees of comfort with restrictions being lifted, and the government will be leaving it to individuals to decide whether they want to be wearing masks after the end of April. Whatever your comfort level is, I encourage you to find ways to get back to doing the things you love and enjoy.

The pandemic has changed the way we as individuals look at what's important in our lives and has provided challenges for many businesses. Couple that with the stressors that are continuing to build ? shortage of perspective employees, supply chain issues, high inflation rates, unaffordable housing, war and strife around the world, and we find that getting back to the way it was is not as easy as it sounds.

As many businesses struggle to find employees, they are finding ways to entice prospective employees or to keep the employees they have. Initiatives like hybrid work, lunch programs, flexible work hours, growth & development plans and increased salaries/allowances are all coming in to play. While employees are facing longer commute times, higher gas costs, and less time spent with their loved ones, they are becoming more appreciative of businesses that understand their dilemmas and who are working on creative ways to make their work experiences easier.

We've all heard the phrase ?The Great Reset?, but what does it really mean when you take the above into account?

I believe it means that we all have to be more creative in the way we look at our business processes and more empathetic towards one another, never underestimate what kindness can bring to the equation, even in a work environment. The days of rigid 9-5 employment are a thing of the past in many industries, and flexibilities/accommodations have become the norm, and in many cases has increased productivity.

So, if you're a business, have the conversations with your employees about what's important to them, and if you're an employee, don't shy away from a discussion on your personal circumstances and how they impact your role at work. You may find that the open dialogue brings creative and innovative ways to increase company productivity and employee satisfaction.