**Business Recovery: Think Cycles, Not Straight Lines**

**By Kawal Preet, President, FedEx, Asia Pacific, Middle East and Africa (AMEA)**

Recovery. There’s a lot packed into that one small word. A positive affirmation. Hope and healing. A process. A journey – and a long, tough road ahead. As we enter the second half of a testing, turbulent year, national economies and individual SMEs are looking to shore up losses, eliminate fiscal uncertainty and generally turn a page towards business recovery.

As both a global company and an SME enabler, it’s something we at FedEx continually take stock of. We’ve crunched data, analyzed capacity shifts, put individual industries under the microscope and - most importantly - spoken with customers.

So - what have we learned? It’s become very clear that business recovery really isn’t the same for everyone. Your individual measure of recovery could be anything from getting back to pre-pandemic bottom line, just breaking even again, or three months straight without order cancellations. For some, simply having back-to-normal staffing, or a work environment that no longer requires PPE will be recovery enough.

Do you know what has become obvious?

**Recovery is absolutely not linear**

Remember the seven stages of grief? Shock, denial, bargaining, guilt, anger, depression and finally: acceptance? It seems that business recovery is a set of stages too. But the real difference is that you can enter any stage, any time, in any order - and there’s nothing to stop you revisiting an earlier phase again and again.

**I believe there are 4 key stages of recovery.**

**Forbearance:** this is the teeth-gritting stage where everything is stacking against you. There’s no room to pivot yet, you just have to endure in the short-term. It goes without saying that you want this stage to pass pretty quickly!

**Resilience**: staying strong, shoring up, keeping lean and doing everything to maintain the status quo or hold your margins.

**Agility:** the first of the active stages. This means making real change: re-thinking core elements of operation, from supply chain to staffing to sales models and service offerings.

**Transformation**: the most dramatic stage. This is the true chrysalis state. You tried all the traditional recovery methods: shift and flex; shed extra weight – but it wasn’t enough. Some startups – or even legacy companies – have been forced into complete metamorphosis so they can survive in an unrecognizable new world. I’ve lost count of the stories of companies in Asia Pacific who decided to reinvent their day-to-day operations and make PPE instead! And these clever transformation stories are blessings we can count, proudly.

Many SMEs aren’t out of the woods yet. But businesses are already in a far superior position, armed with the benefit of long-lens planning and visibility. No business should find themselves unprepared for a similar crisis in future. Our COVID learnings really can future-proof us into 2021 and beyond.

So yes, there’s been a huge realization that recovery isn’t linear – it’s going to be cyclical, sometimes even running in reverse.

Recovery is not a destination, but a journey – and one we’ll all be on for the foreseeable future.