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14°/21°
>

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My
News

Local

NSW

National

World

Opinion

Business

Entertainment

Lifestyle

Sport



Mark Bouris: Stand up for small businesses during NSW lockdown

There is more to the pandemic than health issues, Aussie businessman Mark Bouris writes, saying the state of our economic health is just as important.

Mark Bouris

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Small business must be offered a seat at the table in order to save the next 10 years of the NSW economy. Decisions are being made every day for and about the vast small business community, yet no one's asking small business what they think, what they would do or crucially, how they would steer business out of this economic mess.

Let me begin by stating upfront that the small business community understands and accepts the public health issues and the response by the NSW government.

However, there is more to this current stage of the pandemic than biological and scientific health; there is our economic health to consider, which will have far-reaching consequences beyond us being out of lockdown.

What is the state of our economic health? This is something completely missed at the daily 11am briefings. It frustrates the hell out of the small business community who it affects most, and they feel it's being missed in every decision that's being made on their behalf.

Small business is the biggest contributor to the economic health of NSW. Some 98 per cent of all NSW businesses are small business and when I say ‘businesses’, I mean people’s jobs, people’s livelihoods, their retirement and the value of the business they’ve worked for their whole life.



Small businesses are feeling the full force of the pandemic. Picture: AFP

In an average year, 210,000 small businesses go out of business in Australia. NSW accounts for 34 per cent of the country’s small businesses, which means that across this state nearly 1400 small business close down a week in a “normal year”. No one needs me to tell them that the last eighteen months have been far from normal. The frightening question these stats raise is: how many small businesses have gone to the wall as a result of this pandemic? How many businesses have caught the business virus? These are numbers people ought to know.

In crisis cabinet the government has been looking at one aspect – public health – that was important last year and it’s still important now, however, we’re a lot more mature going through this cycle. We know more about the effects of lockdowns. We know the effect it’s having on mental health, on suicide, depression and the breaking down of communities.

We get the public health issue, but it cannot be divorced from the economic health, the two are bound together. This is why I say this: you're missing something, Premier, and the small business community are available to offer help and experience.

Small business citizens of this state need a seat at the table. What they can bring to the table is what they do best, what they do 365 days a year: they boot-up, suit-up and get on with the business of energising business. It starts with communication.

The small business community just need to know they're being represented. Who is there right now, advocating for small business? There are incredibly smart, capable and intelligent people in the small business community who would be a great resource to work with the government on this.



Mark Bouris fears the long-term impact the pandemic will have on Aussie businesses.

We need a task force of maybe three people representing the regions and metropolitan Sydney. Arm them with the statistics, look at the key industries that are going under, break up NSW into different areas to get a clear and localised picture, then report back to the government as to what's actually happening on the ground.



A month of restrictions has failed to quash an outbreak of the Delta variant in Sydney. Picture: AFP

How has lockdown affected them? Finally, the most important element: the much-needed road map to help small business recover.

Premier, you and the government ask the small business community to hang on, and they will. You say “trust us”, and they will.

But they must be given hope and that hope comes from the small business community knowing that they are an active part of the solution to the problem that’s devastating them. This because is no longer just a public health issue, it’s a rapacious and greedy economic issue.

This is no longer just a current issue, it’s about our great state’s future, our kids’ future. This is not just about today, this is about the next 10 years and the stakeholders want a say in their destiny.