

# Case Study

Ghostfish Brewing Company's  
employee-first response to the Coronavirus Crisis



The impact of the Time to Thrive program  
from Beyond a Break

# Before we start...

This is a story of Ghostfish Brewing Company's visionary response to looking after their employees in this time of crisis. It shows that even when things are hard, a company's strongest asset is always their people – and they should be valued.

Ghostfish is a Seattle based brewery and taproom making award winning gluten-free beers. They started in 2015 and have quickly become well respected innovators, pushing the boundaries of the craft beer market.





# The pandemic hits

Seattle was one of the first epicentres for the virus in the US and was quickly put into lockdown and restrictions. In March 2020, Ghostfish's taproom was forced to close and orders dried up. Of the 40 employees, Ghostfish needed to put almost half of them on temporary leave.

## Concerns rise

As the pandemic unfolded, many in the Ghostfish team were struggling with the pace of change and uncertainty. Ghostfish notified impacted staff and helped them apply for financial assistance from Washington State as part of the 'Standby Program' allowing them access to social security payment while they were temporarily on leave.

Beyond the financial assistance, Jeff Levin, Ghostfish's Head of Finance, HR and Operations, realised it was going to be important to support people through these times.

***"I wanted to help them stay connected in a way that might alleviate some of the fear and sense of loneliness."***

Ghostfish's Managing Owner, Brian Thiel, also felt the weight of the decisions they were being forced to make but was keen to provide assurances to staff.

***"I wanted them to see that the company cared about them. We weren't just kicking them to the curb"***

# The lifeline solution

Brian and Jeff quickly consulted with Lyndall Farley, founder of Beyond a Break and decided to launch the 5-week virtual Time to Thrive program to support their employees. This would help their employees use their time on leave to pause, reflect and recharge so they could return to Ghostfish thriving, when the business needed them most.

Jeff felt that Time to Thrive *“seemed like a lifeline to keep them connected. We had to worry about people’s physical and mental health and also their professional health.”*

The program was a chance to help employees use the time to not only survive the crisis but come out of it stronger in their lives and careers.

Employees were given the option to sign up for the program. Participants then joined weekly 1.5-hour virtual group coaching sessions. Each session introduced topics such as coping with change, creating a purposeful life and career, recharging during stressful times and the psychology of forming healthy habits.

They also learnt how to smoothly return to work while not losing sight of their wellbeing and goals. The online toolkit allowed them to dive deeper into the modules in between sessions with deeper reflection questions, additional tools and inspirational articles and books.

Despite the uncertainty shrouding the economy and the business, the program duration was perfectly timed. Over 5 weeks, the virtual sessions supported employees as they focused on their wellbeing and purpose. The last module then helped them transition back to work at the point they were being recalled from standby leave.



# 'Raring to go' for recovery

While their staff were on leave, Ghostfish were busy restructuring the business to pivot into new revenue streams. They signed some new distribution deals and improved operational efficiency. They became more lean, resilient and ready to thrive in the new economy.

At the same time, participants of the program were using the time to learn, grow and improve their wellbeing.

Jeff realised the impact of the program and the collective mindset.

*“Anytime there’s a crisis, it’s a good time for self-reflection and deciding where you’re going to go. And to me that was a key part of it.”*

Brian saw it as an investment in the company culture.

*“The program created the situation where the employee felt very connected to the culture and the values of the company.”*

Any employee program needs to provide tangible benefits to both employees and the company. In the case of Time to Thrive, upon returning to work, participants had higher levels of engagement, commitment and contribution. Confidence and sense of purpose increased, and they were ready to help Ghostfish recover.

*Jeff - “The proof is in the pudding. For those who are returning - their attitude, their sense of mission, their sense of self confidence is obvious. They’re coming back raring to go.”*

*Brian - “the commitment level rises, the level of contribution to the company rises. You’ve got an employee that you know is now motivated for other reasons than just pay.”*



# Growth in a crisis

With so much change and volatility surrounding the early days of the pandemic it took some courage for employees to sign up and lean into something new. Once they attended the first session, all participants took away some value and wanted to stay the course.

During the program, Aeron Jarvis the Events Manager at Ghostfish commented

*“I enjoy our sessions and I'm getting some good, rich stuff out of this program.”*

All participants completed the program and provided feedback to Ghostfish on their experience.

Kathleen Helfrich, Ghostfish's bookkeeper was delighted with the results

*“Each module provided templates and small steps to building a happy life. It's been a rich growth experience.”*

## The road ahead

Ghostfish Brewing Company are pioneers. Not just in their award-winning gluten-free beers but also in their dedication to looking after staff during this crisis. While other companies were cutting staff adrift, Ghostfish saw the value of their team and wanted to keep them happy and healthy.

Now, as Ghostfish start growing again, they have a workfit workforce ready to help with the recovery. There is a long road ahead of Ghostfish, but with the support of their employees, Ghostfish are now stronger, leaner and ready to take on the world, one gluten-free beer at a time. Cheers!

# About Time to Thrive

Time to Thrive is a virtual group coaching program that supports employees who have been furloughed or forced to take temporary leave. Employees are kept engaged and are supported by a trained coach during their leave. Participation is optional and teams are encouraged to participate together.

Participants are taken through 5 modules, helping them deal with change, improve their wellbeing and get greater purpose in their life and work. Importantly, they're also guided through the return to work process.

The weekly virtual coaching sessions are 1.5 to 2 hours in duration and allow space for people to connect and share their challenges and highlights. Each session introduces a new tool or model and gives participants a chance to apply the approach.

In between sessions, participants have access to an online toolkit allowing them to go as deep as they want into the learning journey with additional tools, reading and reflection questions.

For more information visit [www.beyondabreak.com/timetothrivebusiness](http://www.beyondabreak.com/timetothrivebusiness)

