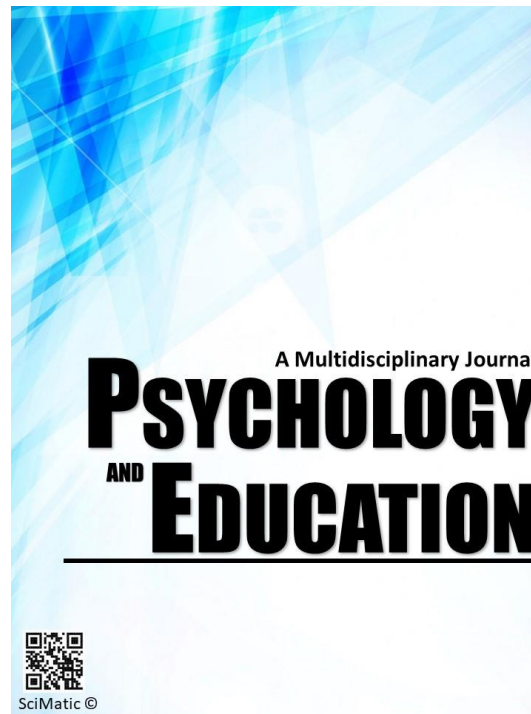


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## It is More Than Just Passion: A Phenomenological Study on Successful Food Business During COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

Pandemic brought a sharp drop in activities, economies, and industries. Food businesses were some of the first economic activities severely affected by it. Negative impacts were seen everywhere such as bankruptcy, job loss, and business closure. It seemed the world was brought to stand still overnight. Hence, a glimpse of hope sparks on food businesses. To stay alive, we need to eat, to continue with our daily activities for survival. This study aims to explore the stories of successful food business owners who started and thrived during COVID-19 pandemic. The experiences and strategies they do to promote and sustain their business will be disclosed to draw inspiration instead of despair in the midst of the pandemic. The challenges and problems they encounter together with how they cope with the critical situation are discussed here. And the inspiring insights regarding successful food business venture had been shared. Thus, four emergent themes: The driving force, Social Media Advertising, Beyond the Negatives, and Envision the Future were formulated and divulged in this research study. Furthermore, this study sought to uncover food business stories of success, considering that it started not in ordinary times but in the time of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. This study is conducted to explore and share positivity like successful food business owners' stories and their journey towards their tremendous success in the midst of crisis.

**Keywords:** Covid-19 Pandemic, Restrictions, Entrepreneurial Strategies, Innovations

### Introduction

Food is fundamental to human existence. Today food has become a social instrument. People are connected through a cup of coffee and celebrate relationships through meals (Joshi, 2019). The food business became alive. But will this withstand the test of time and be able to flourish in this critical time of pandemic? Food industry businesses at this time of pandemic should invest wisely and carefully to attain success.

Nowadays, food businesses are present everywhere. Many successful food business stories became an inspiration and motivation to those who wish to venture in this particular business. However, in the past several months, due to the COVID-19 many businesses establishments experienced closure, loss of revenue, and they need to lay off workers (Ludwig, 2020).

The food industries are most affected when the covid-19 pandemic occurs. In fact, according to Farrer (2020), independent restaurants have been dealt a double blow by COVID-19 globally. Social distancing, curfews, restrictions, risk of infection, and fear were the factors that heightened the struggle in the food industry. And if these situations continue, some restaurants will be forced to close permanently. Considering this context only the powerful and strong companies will survive (Shibata, 2021).

Meanwhile, due to the said pandemic, the sales on food service sectors were plunged because Filipinos' consumption outside their homes was drastically cut by restrictions during COVID-19 (Arcalas, 2020). Transition and innovation are seen as a remedy by the Foodtrepreneurs.

Moreover, in the local setting, Davao city's food supply chain experiences disruptions because of the pandemic. The authorities and local producers are working hard to look for ways to fill shortages, especially of fresh meat that vastly affects the food industry. It also affects food businesses that serves meat like a burger stand, restaurants, and barbecue stands.

On the other hand, the Cotabato region asks the Department of Agriculture (DA) to remove restrictions to proceed with the transport to smoothen the flow of deliveries especially the perishable products (Cayon, 2020). Many food supplies are wasted due to delay in transporting the products in the market.

Researchers have been focused on studying the negative impacts and effects of COVID-19 in the food industry such as bankruptcy, closure, food supply disruptions, restrictions, consumer response, and fear. Some studies deal with how food businesses that are already established in the market were coping with

covid-19 as well as the transition and innovation they made. Yet, no research has been conducted about successful food businesses that started and thrived during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the PPALMA area in Cotabato Province.

Through this study, food business stories of success will be uncovered, considering that it started not in ordinary times but in the time of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. This study is conducted to explore and share positiveness like successful food business owners' stories and their journey towards tremendous success beyond crisis.

### Research Questions

The aim of this research is to explore the stories of successful food businesses which were started and have thrived during the COVID-19 pandemic. It sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of the business owners who ventured into the food business?
2. What strategies did they do to promote and sustain the business?
3. What challenges have been encountered by the food business owners during the COVID-19 pandemic and how do the participants cope with these challenges?
4. What are the insights of the participants regarding successful food business ventures?

### Literature Review

#### Businesses in Food Industry

Humans need food as one of their basic needs and it stands first among all basic needs – food, shelter, and clothing. It is important as it nourishes the human body- sustaining the very existence of humans (Joshi, 2020). Food is life indeed. And the food business never goes out of style as everybody needs to eat every day. And starting a business that is centered on food is a great enterprise according to Whitehead, (2020).

The food industry is one that seamlessly blends elements of art, cultural expression, personal passion, and the provision of a necessity that everyone also enjoys. Entering the food industry is an opportunity to create and/or sell food and drinks that people enjoy that are also direct representations of yourself in a personal and authentic fashion.

Moreover, to widen the horizon on food businesses, Lee (2019), shares five most profitable food businesses

that were all incredible. The top among the list is the bubble tea shop. It is the most profitable because the cost of goods sold is relatively low. These are easy to make and training of staff doesn't require any special skill than cooking. The second profitable business is an ice cream shop. Everyone loves ice cream and the volume potentially go through is high during the summertime. Third, a ramen shop. The best part about a ramen business is the quick turnover. Fourth on the list is a pasta shop, it tops in terms of profitability because of how staple this item is. Fifth is a pizza shop. The investment on a pizza shop is quite high than the others but it can be most profitable because it is basically mixing the dough and the water. Although these food businesses' concept is profit, it doesn't mean that it applies to all. Various aspect in business must be considered.

Similarly, Crampton (2019), shares ten food business ideas for beginners, namely: Bakery, Catering, Food truck, Spice processing, Home cooked meals, Cooking class, Bartender, Meal delivery, Organic food shop, and Microbrewery. These food businesses are suited for beginners. Knowing what, when and how the business works is of great help to ensure the idea of food business is a success. Technically, innovative offering must be added in every food business.

#### COVID-19 and the Food Industry

On March 11, 2020, after having rapidly spread to most countries around the world, the novel corona virus, which started as a localized novel zoonotic disease outbreak in China, in December 2019, has been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), (WHO 2020a). Many industries have been affected by the said pandemic. The food industry is especially vulnerable to the global outbreak's dual effects both in terms of domestic sales and supply chain disruption.

Many food corporations have manufacturing facilities in China, Italy, and other countries where COVID-19 has caused population and economic slowdowns. The COVID-19 is a virus that is currently circulating in United States. As shoppers remain at home and markets shut down, many- known brands in variety of sectors are expected to go bankrupt (Tucker, 2020).

Furthermore, an online survey by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (conducted in early May 2020) found that 66% of people working in the food and beverage industry, over twice as many people (31%) were concerned about their job or income condition.

Worldwide, some of the most vulnerable to the economic shutdowns put in place to combat the pandemic are restaurateurs, while food-service employees who do remain in business must engage in the risky work of serving large numbers of customers face-to-face during this pandemic. And because a timeline on a meaningful dissolution of the outbreak is so uncertain, distributors, manufacturers, and retailers must prepare to offer significant deviations in their current approach, by considering diversions to alternative sourcing locations, and an enhanced focus on inventory management. Restaurants and foodservice businesses were some of the first economic activities seriously impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As social distancing guidelines took hold in cities and counties dining in restaurants practically come to a halt.

Furthermore, Ellerby (2020), even shares seven ways how covid-19 restrictions such as social distancing will change restaurants: Low customer numbers, as social distancing allows 1meter distance and 50% establishment capacity. New hygiene measures include the use of physical barriers and protective equipment. Local over city center- as travel restrictions occur people are led to turn to local restaurants for convenience. A different meal experience, as dining out provides an experience that is different from home but with social distancing, it is very different because service interactions will be limited. Changing menus, as discounts and affordable menus must be considered. More takeaways, as customers remain cautious about going out to eat. And Restaurant closure, as demand becomes low, additional requirements to operate, limited business hours, and for safety reasons many restaurants chose to close. Covid-19 indeed caused devastating effects on the food industry.

Similarly, Aday & Aday (2020), revealed in his study that greater consumer demand resulted in empty shelves and a decrease in supply caused an increase in the price of meat products. Food services were also affected, and some restaurants stopped serving beef. Many meat products are out of supply.

Moreover, a research team has been working to develop rapid response strategies for the industry like restaurants and food service businesses were some of the first economic activities that were severely impacted by the covid-19 pandemic (Bauer, 2020).

Nevertheless, small businesses are thriving during this pandemic. In fact, in an article written by Ludwig (2020), he enumerated a list of small business types that are seeing strong demand during the coronavirus

pandemic: Cleaning services, the spread of coronavirus fears all over the country, it should come as no surprise that professional cleaning services that sanitize offices, restaurants, and homes are in high demand. Delivery services, professional delivery services have stepped up to make certain goods can be delivered to homes and businesses. Many consumers are afraid to leave their homes or being advised by state governments to shelter in their

homes during the corona virus crisis. The next business is the Drive-in movie theaters. One of the most peculiar small business categories that have newly viewed success in the corona virus era is movie theaters offering drive-in. It allows people to take in a show from their car and provide a way for families to get out of the house. Hailing on the list is the grocery stores. People are practicing “social distancing” and many are closing their restaurant dining rooms, more families are stocking up on goods and eating at home (Ludwig, 2020). Another thriving business is the Liquor and wine stores. The list also includes the Meal prep delivery services. Top brands for meal

preparation and delivery are skyrocketing due to people spending more time at home and less at restaurants.

Taking advantage of this trend, various small businesses that offer meal preparation and delivery are also viewing an augmented demand. Impressively another business makes it on the list, the game makers and sellers. The covid-19 forcing many people to stay at home instead of going out was seen by small businesses that create board games and puzzles making it popular since they help entertain families at their homes. The board games and puzzles are in demand, especially the timely cooperative board game Pandemic (Marney, 2020).

Besides, small video game makers that work on creative titles for children are seeing a rising demand with many kids unable to attend school. The landscaping and yard care companies also make their way to the type of business thriving this pandemic. As more people in different places are stuck in their homes due to covid-19 fears, homeowners were given much more time to attend to their lawns and gardens. Plant lovers are emerging the nature is smiling. As such, landscaping and general yard care companies are beholding unseasonably good business.

Furthermore, another business trend is the Bread-baking companies. The pandemic has pushed more people to a lot more time at home cooking, baking, and making all sorts of new recipes. One part of this new

trend is specifically bread making and cookies, which is of great help in easing stress and showcase their newly discovered skills.

Meanwhile, Tutoring businesses are also in demand. With many schools all over the world shifting from in-person learning or face-to-face learning to online learning modalities for some or all instruction. Thus, making some parents raised concerns about the transition that their children may fall behind. One-way parents are working to keep their kids' education as track as possible is by finding and hiring equipped tutors. Hence, strict regulations and requirements of following the recommendations of the public health department must have complied. Preferably, most of the services will be provided virtually such as Zoom.

Furthermore, accompanying the rise of small businesses despite pandemics, are some strategies and innovations. A relevant study conducted by Farrer (2020), on independent restaurant owners during this pandemic shares some coping innovations they have met such as a sushi bar turns into a take-out service in Japan and fine dining restaurants proving pack meals for delivery. A lot of new things are being created and discovered just to surpass the said crisis. And if there is one thing the covid-19 outbreak has shown us, it is that markets are dynamic (Jaworski, Kohli, & Sahay, 2000) and can move rapidly.

Considering this, starting a food business despite a pandemic is quite uncertain and risky. Hence, successful food business owners will showcase their way to succeed. Though starting a food business needs a more strategic approach, running it will need tenacious skills, and maintaining it requires a heart full of firm determination. A business that can sustain and survive even with a greater risk elevated by a pandemic is amazing. The entrepreneurs' courage, the risks and challenges they have met, the skills they have gained, the techniques they have used, and the actual experiences they have encountered, and the latest innovations they have created will be now written and remembered in the history of the food industry. Many new business types thrived despite the Covid-19 pandemic. Many industries are adapting to the current situation where no one is uncertain nor tell when will this pandemic ends.

### Successful Businesses Context

Behind every successful business, is a person who makes it succeed. And every successful person has his own story. Probably, he creates his own story and his success shows it to the world.

One concrete example of a successful business story that inspires Filipinos today is the man behind Jollibee, Tony Tan Caktiong. The amazing transformation with a twist of innovations of a small ice cream parlor to a multi-billion fast-food empire. He outlined that "innovation starts in our minds. Accomplishing something is determine by our mindset". Undeniably, this story continues to inspire and lighten every individual to try and create.

Meanwhile, a business daily writer, Kuligowski (2020), shares five tips on how to create a business success strategy from how business owners see success. The first tip is taking the time to examine the industry and that includes the short and long-term goals. It is to set yourself on the exact path to greatness. Next, is to write down business-oriented goals. Pinpoint it on the long-term goals and see what success means. Sometimes, listing down ideas on paper helps outline a vision for success. A business plan is vital because it will become the backbone of a business in achieving desired goals. Third, be objective. Remain as realistic and directed as possible. "Passion is significant, but never allow it to cloud your judgement". Fourth, use the SMART method: Be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-oriented. This method will help keep the purpose in mind and create a business goal. Lastly, study your field. Research the industry, the competitors, and the market. This will keep time, effort, and hardships all worthy. Remember that a successful business should be worthy to be called success.

This literature review examines how the food industry has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. It further illustrates the impacts and effects of the pandemic such as food supply disruptions, low customer demands, new hygiene measures, changing menus, and business closure. Along with this, the need to explore food business owners' perspectives on how to respond to the pandemic must be considered to ease the damage that this pandemic to the food industry.

### Methodology

A descriptive phenomenological qualitative design was followed in this study. Descriptive phenomenology is a commonly used tool of science to analyze and explain individuals living experiences. Furthermore, Edmund Husserl (cited in Cristensen, Welch, & Barr, 2017). believes that purging or cleansing of the mind allows the essence of the phenomena to shine through. Using this, this research study will be guided by naturalness and

truthfulness.

Moreover, this study about successful food business stories during the COVID-19 pandemic is qualitative phenomenological research that is to find existing information and data regarding the factors on how the food businesses become successful despite the different difficulties that they encounter in this time of the pandemic.

This study discusses the successful stories of every food business owners and the challenges they encounter to become successful during this COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers decided to use a qualitative approach to validate observations on this study.

### Participants

The participants of the study were eight selected successful food business owners in PPALMA based on the criteria set by the researchers. The participants were also chosen because they have started their food business during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are successful in terms of profit and their goal. Their businesses are outstanding and in demand to the market in their municipality. The lived experiences of food business owners towards the phenomenon and handling business despite pandemic is beyond risking. However, they have managed and paved their way to succeed.

### Instruments of the Study

Purposive sampling was used in this study, which involves conscious selection by the researcher of certain population groups to include in the study. The open population refers to the total number of cases that meet the defined criterion and are available to the researcher. The participants of the study were chosen according to the following criteria: food business owners who started a food business during the COVID-19 pandemic in the municipality of Pikit, Aleosan, Midsayap, and Libungan and succeeded in their venture. To facilitate this, an interview guide was developed to provide an insight as to who met the criteria. These individuals were notified through a formal letter of invitation.

### Procedure

The researchers secured an approval letter from the Dean of the College of Education to conduct a study and noted it by their Research instructor. After seeking approval, they also gave a letter of consent and participation to their selected participants. The schedule of when and where the interview will take

place was also settled for the participants. The questions were prepared in advanced and were open-ended and semi-structured.

Permission to use the video or audio recorder was arranged in advance during face-to-face in-depth interviews, and Inter-Agency Task Force protocols are strictly followed. The researchers as the data collector are in semi-formal attire provided with protective devices to ensure safety.

All CPs answered the same set of questions as stated in the interview guide. The interview proper was pre-set, meeting selected successful food business owners gave the researchers the opportunity to communicate with them personally. Thankfully enough, they responded positively with goodwill. The conversations took place in a certain place where they felt comfortable to express their thoughts openly. The researchers asked their approval before the face-to-face interview that an audio or video recorder would be used according to their preference. Two participants chose video recording while the six participants chose audio recording. Also, it was discussed that informed consent form requires their signature as prerequisite to the interview proper. All of them understood that their identity and names would not be mentioned in the study

Then, interviews were conducted on the set date and time. The researchers should attempt to create an atmosphere of trust, friendliness, and openness from the moment the interview starts. Transcribing and Analysis followed.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in a qualitative study have particular resonance because of the in-depth nature of the study process (Arifin, 2018). Thus, the protection of every human subject, through the application of appropriate ethical principles are valuable in all areas of research. The following ethical considerations influenced this research.

Integrity of qualitative research is determined by its trustworthiness, or value to the audience. The criteria for evaluating trustworthiness of a qualitative study are: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Patton, 2002 as cited in Paredes, 2010).

Credibility is the equivalent of internal validity in quantitative research and is concerned with the aspect of truth-value (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Strategies to ensure



credibility are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation and member check. The researchers assured to follow a well-established research method to ensure honesty, accuracy in terms of trustworthiness.

Transferability of results is important for readers to make connections to their experience and knowledge base. Transferability concerns the aspect of applicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Korstjens & Moser, 2018), which allows the reader to assess whether the findings are transferable to their own setting; this is called transferability judgement. Furthermore, to strengthen transferability, the researchers provided a detailed account of procedures and results.

Dependability includes the aspect of consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Korstjens & Moser, 2018). the analysis process is in line with the accepted standards for a particular design. To enhance dependability, the researchers properly described the process of the implementation of the research design in detail so other researchers can execute the same strategy if they wish to conduct similar study.

Confirmability concerns the aspect of neutrality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researchers secure the inter-subjectivity of the data. Confirmability is ensured that the experiences of successful food business owners are accurately depicted. The researchers remain objective and set aside personal biases while carrying out the study.

## Results

This section presents the findings according to the study's research questions. 1. What are the experiences of the business owners who ventured into food business? What were their strategies to promote and sustain the business? 2. What challenges have been encountered by the food business owners in their business during the COVID-19 pandemic and how did the participants cope with these challenges? 3. What were the participant's insights regarding successful food business ventures?

Considering that not all challenges encountered by the food business owner can be captured and described in a positive way, the study relied on the CPs shared experiences. This method provides a useful way for understanding how this phenomenon happens (De Guzman as cited by Nacario, 2019) and how it is shared and illumined by personal and professional

experiences.

To comprehend the essence of the subject's challenges and success encountered, an in-depth interview was used in the gathering of the data. This statement made the researchers interested to investigate the struggles that the food business owner went through as they started their career in food business and how they handled it. As they enter the world of business, the reason for their continued courage to face and deal with the challenges at the start of their career despite pandemics is for believing that they have contributed to their family, society and enhanced their skills in business.

### Categorization of Emergent Themes

After the interview, the audio and video records from the conversation were transcribed, translated, and analyzed. The presentation of information in table form is patterned after the study (Amparo, 2011), which made use of three classifications: the general, the typical and the variant.

The first classification of the response of the conversational participants is the general. It means that at least 50 percent or four (4) of the participants in this study mention the item in their response during the interview. The typical, on the other hand, means that 26 percent to 49 percent or three (3) participants mentioned the item in the interview. Meanwhile, the variant means that less than 25 percent or two (2) participants mention the item.

In organizing the core ideas, the themes were formulated based on the research question and referred to as major themes. Opposite the major themes are the core ideas from the responses of the CPs. Another column was included in the table showing the general, the typical, and the variant responses depending on the frequency of the item being mentioned. The third step is the drawing of a conclusion and verification that point in the study (Miles and Huberman adopted by Nacario, 2019). In this stage, the preliminary ideas and patterns about the findings are developed.

Table 1. *Profile of the Conversational Partner*

Participants	Age	Gender	Date Started the Business Operation	Location
FB1	23	Female	January 28, 2021	Midsayap
FB2	23	Female	June 20, 2020	Midsayap
FB3	25	Female	December 19, 2020	Pikit
FB4	42	Male	March 27, 2020	Pikit
FB5	50	Female	June 20, 2020	Aleosan
FB6	17	Female	July 30, 2020	Aleosan
FB7	20	Female	September 29, 2020	Libungan
FB8	32	Male	September 19, 2020	Libungan



Table 2. Themes and Core Ideas on the stories of Successful Food Business Owners during COVID-19 Pandemic

Major Theme	Core Ideas	Classification of Response
The Driving Force	The Need for Extra Source of Income	General
	Inspired by Family and Friends	General
Social Media Advertising	Mixed Experiences	General
	Promotions through Social Media	General
	Updates on Facebook Page	General
Beyond the Negatives	Embracing New and Maintaining Consistency	Typical
	Negative Feedback	Typical
	COVID-19 Restrictions	General
	Firmly Facing the Situation	Typical
Envision the Future	The Need to be Patient	Typical
	Product Improvement and Creation	General
	Treatment on Staff	Typical
	Study your Business	Typical
	Start Small	Typical
	Think outside the box	Variant
	It is not just passion alone	Typical

## Discussion

The research's principal goal is to explore the observable and read manifestations of the experiences, challenges, and insights of food business owners based on their personal experiences in the business world.

Kulkarni mentioned that the goal of qualitative phenomenological research is to describe lived experiences of a phenomenon (as cited by Nacario, 2019). It should be noted that the methods and analysis of data are different from traditional or quantitative methods of research. In some way, the participants described their lived phenomenal experiences through their shared narratives. There were eight food business owners as participants in the study. Their lived experiences, which they freely narrated and discussed, were categorized into themes based on the core ideas they have expressed in response to the questions asked from them.

## Conclusion

Food business owners find motivation in sustaining their business through an inspiration. This keeps them work hard and achieve their goals. A driving force that keeps them motivated in any circumstances. Driving

forces are personal or motivators; the “why” someone does what they do. It simply measures what motivates a person’s behaviors (Clark, 2018). Driving force can also be coined to the inspiration of a person that pushed them to try and venture a certain career. These driving forces will keep igniting the flame until you reach your dream in the business world.

Furthermore, some participants were inspired mostly by their family and friends. They expressed that having a family is the greatest gift of all. In consonance with this, George (2019), narrates that family knows what you are capable of and through their words and actions motivate you to be successful. While you can be inspired by anyone and anything, being inspired by the people you love most holds a greater weight.

Moreover, experiences of food business owners may vary because of different perspectives. It can be challenging, satisfying, fun, risky, or good. It depends on how you perceive your life experiences. Business owners' involvement in running their business also varies. Some have full control of their business while others have partners to share with their experience. In fact, according to Murrow (2020), being a food business owner is a long-awaited dream for many enterprising individuals who love food, who love to entertain, and who love the overall experience of food as a community.

Furthermore, in the study of Sherman (2019), stated that, no matter how well you plan and prepare, starting a business is a gamble. They take the risks in business, explore, and challenge themselves to conquer the new chapter of their life in the business world. The mixed experiences that the food business owners shared varied learnings as they begin to venture into the food industry. It was supported by the Opportunity based theory wherein they made opportunities available for them to grow and venture.

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