

TRANSITION TIPS

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There is a paradigm shift in our society and company culture will shift as a result of new modes of work, shrinking workforce, and changes in business operations. As a result of the pandemic, transition back to the workplace is not going to be a one size fits all. Every employee within the organization, from the CEO down, will have their own perspective and views on when it is safe, what is safe and varying comfort levels with being back in an office environment.

It will be imperative for businesses to be intentional and systematic in their return to the workplace. Business owners and leaders want to keep their employees safe and healthy but they also want to get business operations back up and running to maintain revenue. Open and transparent communications with employees is an essential element to a business' response to the situation. Ask yourself as an employer, how do you want to be remembered for handling the shutdown and re-opening from the COVID-19 pandemic? Let the answer to that question help guide you as you welcome your employees back to the workplace.

These are some key factors to keep in mind as you consider transitioning employees back to the physical work environment.

MESSAGING

- » Be intentional. Do not try to pack too many messages into one communication. Rather, space them out and communicate in a regular cadence to ensure attention and comprehension.
- » Be transparent and open in order to foster trust and faith in the company and its leadership as well as build momentum for the future.
- » Help motivate your employees and build morale. Share messages of success as well as messages of vulnerability. Remind your employees, "You're a valuable part of our business. Stay with us, we have your back." Back up these messages of appreciation and support with actions whenever possible because actions speak louder than words.

SUPPORT

- » Implement group or team check-ins. Task your managers to hold one-to-one meetings or calls weekly with their direct reports in order to see how their employees are doing and feeling and to show employees that the company cares about them. If the company is large, or managers have too many reports to check in with everybody weekly, consider creating a buddy system for employees to hold personal check-ins with each other on a weekly basis.
- » Celebrate the small wins. People have dealt with a lot in a very short period of time. Let them know you care about the small things too by giving them things to be proud of and excited about, no matter how small they may be. For example recognize employees for collaboration, innovation, creativity and perseverance during difficult times.

FLEXIBILITY

- » Each employee's needs will vary when it comes to childcare, caring for elderly parents, commuting to work, and comfort level and perceived safety around other people. This is likely to continue for quite a while. It is crucial not to put pressure on people to have to be present in the physical office and to offer flexibility. Be cognizant of the perceived 'negative' effect that if leadership is at the office the employees should be too.
- » A phased approach to re-entry will allow you to introduce a select number of employees at a time to the workplace. This will require flexibility by design as considerations are made for where employees will be in proximity to each other to allow appropriate physical distancing as well as testing and ensuring employee health before introducing the next phase of employees. It is best to have a plan in place and yet be ready to change that plan as needed.

SETTING THE EXAMPLE

- » Leaders may think they're expected to be the first back to the office as soon as it's deemed safe by state government, however it is a very personal choice. Those leaders that are not comfortable should voice this and show their employees that it is okay, and acceptable, to not feel 100% comfortable returning to the physical environment. This instills more humanity into the process of return to work.
- » Leaders should also model the behavior of staying home or working remote when feeling ill. Now, more than ever, it is important for anybody not feeling well to stay out of the office building to prevent an outbreak.

SHOW EMPATHY

Employees feel better about and are more likely to speak up about their own fears and needs when they see leaders doing the same. It's important to be empathetic to what others are experiencing and have experienced. Just because one person may not have been directly impacted by the virus does not mean they are invincible or that they are not affected at all. Empathy is a powerful human ability and now more than ever it will help to foster deeper connections amongst employees.