

COVID-19 Return to Work - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Managers

The effects of COVID-19 are extensive and have required businesses and organizations to adapt. For many, this included a transition to entirely remote workforces for an extended period of time. Employees have since adjusted to working from home and have structured their day-to-day to a remote work environment. As the pandemic evolves, many organizations are working to facilitate a safe return to office plan. However, work environments will look and function differently, especially when it comes to space utilization, social distancing capabilities, and face coverings. Organizations may consider preparing their people leaders with answers to some common questions in order to support their employees and bring them together effectively, safely, and with sensitivity. Below are a few questions that may come up as the return to office shift begins.

What is the best way to handle resistance from employees being asked to return onsite after working remotely for a significant length of time?

- Create communications that are clear and frequent. Outline what employees can expect when returning to the office and provide visual aids if possible.
- Provide return-to-office guidelines that include your organization's safety precautions such as seating arrangements, building modifications, care kits, office cleaning, use of common areas, social distancing practices, and personal protective equipment expectations.
- Be prepared to outline your organization's remote work policies. It may be beneficial to remind employees of the organizational value in face-to-face interactions and collaboration when working in an in-office environment.
- An all-employee FAQ document can help your organization anticipate and address concerns that may exist for those at higher risk of contracting COVID-19 or those who may be experiencing anxiety when it comes to returning to the office. Have leadership use these questions to foster open conversations so employees feel heard and safe.
- Announcing time frames for your organization's approach to returning to work will give your employees time to review and understand the new office guidelines and make any personal adjustments on their end to prepare.

How do I support employees who are fearful of returning to an office environment?

- Listen to concerns and empathize. Ensure that there are ongoing opportunities for employees to connect with their leaders, teams, and human resource representative to have their concerns heard and their questions answered. For many, return to work may cause as much stress as the initial work from home order. Be mindful that personal adjustments will have to be made and each employee is different. Be sure your people leaders understand the FAQs, return-to-office guidelines, and are able to direct employees to appropriate resources to have their concerns addressed.
- Arrange for training and webinars to provide employees with self-care tools and resources such as how to cope with change, stress, and anxiety, or other relevant topics. Also, host meetings or provide communication pieces to explain coronavirus-related accommodations and physical changes happening through buildings, workstations, common areas, public restrooms, and sanitary stations.

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- Highlight any organization resources that may help employees adjust to returning to office such as the employee assistance program that can connect them to counseling services, childcare/elderly-care resources, financial and legal assistance, and managing stress. Consider establishing a dedicated email inbox for return-to-office questions. Sharing this information in team meetings and providing as much time for adjustment as possible will help ease the change.

How do I address employee concerns that the organization does not have a vaccination requirement?

- Refer to the organizations return-to-the-office guidelines and highlight the safety precautions that are being put in place. Listen to employee concerns and ask what they feel could be done to make them feel safe.
- Understand and reinforce the company's position on the COVID-19 vaccine (e.g., while vaccines are highly encouraged, employees have the right to make their own personal health decisions privately).
- Provide a human resource contact who can review any special considerations or work from home exceptions that have been established by the organization.

What do employees need from you to manage change?

- Be certain that you understand what's changing. You can best explain a change if you understand it yourself. When you hear the news first, ask questions if you have any. Be especially clear on how the change benefits the company and how it affects your team. When you explain the change to your team, avoid using jargon and keep your team updated on a regular basis.
- As a manager or supervisor, your attitude sets the tone for your team. While change can be stressful, try to stay positive. Focus on maintaining the morale of your team. Small but meaningful gestures can go a long way. Leave a message of thanks on their voicemail, praise them in a note or tell them face to face how much you appreciate them.
- It is your responsibility as a manager to help employees weather the change in a positive manner. As their manager, you have the most direct contact with your employees and are able to explain how the change will affect them individually. Support and advise your employees through their reactions, while still highlighting the benefit to the company, your customers, and your team.

Need help or more ideas? Call your EAP to find resources near you.
We're here to help!

Call toll-free, 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

TTY users call:

Or visit us at:

Company code:

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