

Three Things You Must do When You Return to the Office



With the Covid vaccine beginning to circulate, we expect to start seeing a shift of returning to the office in 2021. While many employees might be feeling bittersweet about this return, it is vital to have a protocol in place to welcome them back safely and comfortably. Here are three things you must do when you return to the office to make your team feel comfortable and protected.



1. Create Specific Covid Safety Protocols or Policies

While the news of vaccines is to be celebrated, it's not going to make things go "back to normal" overnight. Many aspects of a traditional work environment will not return to how they were pre-pandemic until at least the second half of 2021. This means it is crucial your company does everything it can to create specific protocols and policies for Covid safety for your returning workers. It's also important that these protocols are clearly communicated to your team - and enforced. Some things to consider implementing to keep your employees safe include:

- **Educate Your Employees on Health and Safety Practices** - In a world full of misinformation, it's important to layout clear education on proper health and safety practices you expect your employees to adhere to while in the office. Provide guidelines - verbal and visual - that your employees can follow and refer to on a regular basis.
- **Have a Plan for a Covid Exposure or Positive Test** - Chances are pretty high you will have employees test positive for Covid or come in contact with a positive case. You **MUST** have a plan in place to safely alert and protect your other employees. Start by mandating that sick employees stay home. Run routine health checks; such as symptoms or temperature checks. You should also have a contact tracing plan in place.
- **Provide a Safe Work Environment** - Make sure your employees are only in the office if they have to be. If their work can be done remotely, it's best to keep them that way, at least for the first half of 2021. For those who will return to the office, make sure they have a safe work environment. Keep your team members at least six feet apart from one another, shut-down common spaces, have consistent cleaning and disinfection, and incorporate as many contactless operations as possible.
- **Explore all Ways to Limit Risk** - Avoid holding in-person meetings, discourage travel - both work and non-work related, and postpone any company gatherings until it is safe to do so again.



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2. Provide Continued Flexibility

Research supports remote work options are better for staff and for overall productivity. Data show 77% of workers actually report increased productivity while working remotely. Of WFH staff, 53% take less time off, and 23% report working longer hours. Maybe most persuading is 83% of workers report that being able to work from home contributes to overall job satisfaction. Happy and satisfied employees are engaged employees. Engaged employees are the ones who not only get things done; they go above and beyond.

Working from home has offered many employees the opportunity to have more flexibility in their schedules. Many will be looking to continue this to some extent upon returning to the office. For example, many parents have enjoyed being able to work around their children's school schedules - especially if their children are also remote learning. Some enjoy starting their work earlier in the morning and finishing earlier in the afternoon (or visa versa), or simply being able to run errands during an off hour lunch break to avoid crowds.

Being able to continue supporting this employee flexibility will be a high priority as your team returns to the office. Failing to do so might cause your top talent to start looking elsewhere for a company that will offer them this continued support.

3. Show Gratitude and Value to Your Team

Perhaps one of the biggest things you can do is show gratitude and appreciation to your team. This has been a challenging year with many uncertainties, and you and your team has faced them. Make sure you communicate that you value them, appreciate them, and are grateful for them.

Take into consideration how your employees who have children at home have had to balance being a worker, parent, and probably teacher all at the same time. Your employees who have dealt with loss. Those who have had to deal with partners being laid off or furloughed. And those who have been struggling with their mental health and wellness through this pandemic. Be sure to communicate this gratitude you have for how they've helped your company navigate through the challenges and uncertainties this past year has brought. Make sure your team knows they are valued.

With the slow and sometimes ever-changing standards for returning to "normalcy," be prepared to pivot and shift plans as your employees come back to the office. Business leaders should be asking the tough questions. Is it safe? Is it necessary? How can I make staff feel secure and valued? Answering these questions and implementing the solutions decided will be key to a successful return to the office.

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