



GUIDE

Ready to Reopen? Six Strategies to Support Employees

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Ready to Reopen? Six Strategies to Support Employees

As some businesses begin to reopen their doors, employees' mental and physical wellbeing remain a priority.

Flexibility is key. Many companies are offering their employees the option to work-from-home until 2021. For those who must or wish to return to the office, how can you make the transition as easy as possible and maintain a happy and healthy workforce?

From checklists to essays, there's a lot of advice out there. Where do you begin? Our business leaders had the same thoughts when we first transitioned our Hong Kong and Singapore employees back in March. Since then, and following many hours of internal and external consultations, the lion's share of our global workforce have decided to return to the office.

Now, we're in the position to share what we've learned. If you're transitioning back to the office, prepare to REOPEN with these six must-do steps. ▶



Recognize who needs the office most

To ensure social distancing rules are maintained, it will be helpful to be able to stagger the number of employees in the office at any one time.

It is therefore important to determine those who need the space most - either for collaboration, or technical resources they can't get at home.

Once again, employees should be involved in this and allowed to be open about their own needs and desires.

However, it is also important that you are aware of the potential pitfalls of staggering the workforce and avoid reinforcing hierarchies or alienating workers who may feel they aren't being given sufficient care or attention. ▶

Engage with employees to get buy-in

Regardless of your approach, employees must be involved from the outset.

Decisions which affect their health and safety should never appear to be taken entirely out of individuals' hands, and the simple fact of involving employees will buy a great deal of credibility and trust.

Leaders should also take the opportunity to check in with their workers on a personal level – to

demonstrate a level of openness within the organization and make sure workers are coping with the uncertainty and stress of the pandemic.

That said, it is also important leaders lead; you need to stay strong and inspire confidence from employees, without ever seeming to cede responsibility or be uncertain as to how things can be done safely. ▶



Organize workers into different groups

Just as staggering the number of employees present at any one time will mitigate risks, so too will ensuring there is minimal crossover between different groups.

Focus on putting together groups where individuals will most benefit from each other's presence, whether that is through

collaboration or simply sharing useful information; ideally these groups will be diverse and broad, allowing for a fruitful mixture of perspectives despite the overall reduction in size.

While this might seem a recipe for isolation and the creation of tribes, workers already do the vast majority of their communicating within their immediate groups, so far less will be lost than you might think. ▶



Pandemic-proof the workspace

Clearly, government guidance must be followed extremely closely.

However, there is more to be done to secure the workspace and ensure workers feel as safe as possible.

You may need to provide PPE to workers; invest in sneeze

guards or branded hand sanitizer; or create safety education material to make the process of adapting easier and more pleasant for employees.

A large part of this is how you communicate the changes: if employees don't understand the steps taken to protect them, they simply won't feel protected. ▶

Effectively communicate your decisions

All of these steps – from how you’ve pandemic-proofed the office to how the workforce is being staggered – will need to be communicated clearly and honestly to the entire organization.

How effectively you communicate will determine how

successful your transition back to work will be: it

will affect how well understood the process is by individual workers and it will affect the overall morale of the team.

Emphasize clarity and consistency; nothing will hurt your transition back to work more than unclear, contradictory messaging. ▶



Negotiate flexible working

After months of flexible working being not just allowed but required, it will be tough for leaders to rain it in – and they shouldn't want to.

Flexibility clearly provides a whole host

of benefits – from improved productivity and job satisfaction to facilitating greater diversity.

But it will also be pivotal for leaders navigating the difficulties of a staggered workforce and a huge variety of workers' needs.

Being able to give workers the freedom to determine how they work will empower them; this empowerment will in turn create greater trust, which is vital for a confident return to the office.

Moving forward, flexibility at work is likely to be an accepted norm; leaders should embrace it wholeheartedly and see how they can benefit from it too.

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