



Preparing for the Return

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As states begin to reopen and companies begin to welcome back their employees, there is a need to recognize that some employees are going to be ready to jump in and go, while others are going to be apprehensive. No matter which side of the spectrum the employee is, there are things that leadership needs to consider before opening the door to your number one customer – your staff.

According to the Institute for Public Relations only about 10 percent of executives surveyed have created an “extensive” plan for returning to work. In order to welcome employees back in a manner that demonstrates your dedication to safety, your willingness to be supportive, and the company’s desire to lift morale, consider the following actions prior to bringing people back to work.

Manage employee numbers

More people brings a higher risk of exposure, which for some can increase of anxiety. Controlling the number of workers is going to be important not only for protecting physical health, but also the mental well-being of the employees.

Managing the numbers could mean:

- Planning a staggered reintroduction of staff back into the office
- Rotating employees working from home every few days
- Recognizing that there may not be a need to bring everyone back the way it was

Fight the urge to bring everyone back at the same time so you can get back to normal and allow people to ease back into work.

Maintain remote working

Rolling lockdowns may continue to happen depending where you live and threat of COVID-19. To continually bring people back to a central location and then send them home to work remotely can be disruptive.

Rethink the physical setup

The CDC requirements for physical distancing will still be in place. This means that workspaces as well as common areas are going to need to be reconfigured prior to people coming back to work.

Rebuild morale

Some people are going to come back with concerns, questions, apprehension, and anxiety. This is going to impact the morale of the staff and the organization. One of the keys to improving morale is to focus on creating a culture that is focused on stability, hope, trust, and compassion.

The Village EAP is taking COVID-19 very seriously and we are working to provide the best continued services to you. If you feel like you or an employee could benefit from talking to a counselor and have our EAP contract, please contact The Village EAP at 1-800-627-8220 to access your free and confidential sessions. We are here so you don't have to go it alone.

Ways to rebuild the morale of an organization include:

- Promote organizational and individual achievements
- Promote the vision for the future by clarifying what the next few months are going to look like
- Approach changes with sensitivity
- When the time is right, conduct some team-building activities such as a company picnic or other social events to allow people to reconnect
- Focus less on the bottom line and more on your employees

Review infrastructure needs

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new changes to almost every organization, and in some cases the old way may not return, which means that there is a need to reexamine potential shortcomings in the previous infrastructure. Determine if there are areas the organization can grow and develop for the future.

Maintain regular communication

Employees are going to have a lot of questions about safety, physical distancing, and the future. Leadership needs to know the answers as best they can, and they need to convey these answers in a clear and concise manner to employees. A greater level of open communication in addition to the ability to answer questions leads to greater trust and stability for employees.

Evaluate and embed your learning

Despite the disruption and struggles brought on by COVID-19, there is some opportunity for development based on what we have experienced. Consider some of the adaptations that have been utilized during the pandemic and see if there are ways to incorporate them into the new normal.

Know your EAP services

Nearly 20 percent of the population has some level of anxiety, and the COVID-19 pandemic has had an effect on their anxiety levels. Know that mental health services that are available to your staff through your EAP and be an advocate for utilizing these services. It is important to remind people to talk about their experiences so they can begin to move forward.

This pandemic has presented organizations with the opportunity to breakdown silos and build collaborative relationships. By focusing on the employee when developing a reentry plan and considering the need to establish an organization rooted in trust, stability, compassion, and hope, organizational leadership can reshape the culture in a significant manner.

References

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