

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Managing a Team Going Back to Work After the Self-Isolation Lifts

After physical distancing and stay-at-home orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many people may be excited to return to their workplaces. However, this change might be a tricky one for employees who have been working from home or furloughed for months. As a manager, your team will look to you for leadership during this time of transition.

Plan ahead. Because the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was so sudden, many managers didn't have the chance to plan what work would look like during this time in terms of staff, productivity, and projects. But as a manager, your team will look for your leadership to guide work expectations. In the days leading up to the return, identify your resources. Confirm how many team members you have returning to work, and if they will all be working full-time. Also identify the projects that are your priorities. Setting clear expectations of work priorities will make it easier to plan your first weeks back at work.

Get familiar with the safety guidelines in place. Continue to follow any safety recommendations made by governmental and healthcare agencies. Do you need to maintain physical distancing at work? Should hand sanitizer be provided at desks? Request to be on a building manager's email list to receive any updates pertaining to the worksite. These will help you adjust your expectations of what work will now look like, and help you answer any questions your team might have.

Communicate with your team. In the days before your workplace reopens, it's a good idea to message your team, ensuring they have everything that they need for a successful return. Remain mindful that some employees may have lost child care options previously available and may be anxious about locating new resources. Assist them to connect with the right department or resource(s) to help them meet their needs. When you're back at work, make time for one-on-one catch-ups both to check in with their well-being as well as their workload. It is also a good idea to include a "Welcome Back" meeting for all team members. Seeing friendly faces will probably be a welcome change for those who have been working at home during the pandemic.

Ease the transition through flexible work options. You might find that some employees who have been working from home now really enjoy it; others might have to continue to work from home to accommodate for childcare or elder care responsibilities. If an employee expresses concerns about being able to make a full-time office-based schedule work, see what options are available to them for working from home, working flexible hours, or working part-time.

Make priorities and expectations clear. If you've planned ahead, you'll know what projects should be tackled first. Make it clear to your team what projects should be completed first, and what deadlines you need to be followed. You might consider putting a quick and easy prioritized project task list, so your team feels they've accomplished something important in their first week. They can build off that momentum in the weeks that follow.

Keep regular office hours. If you're worried about having too much work to do, it can be tempting to stay hours past when you would usually go home. Your team will look to you for leadership and follow your example. Make it clear that work-life balance is a priority to keep your team happy, and leave the office when the day is done.
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