

How to support your employees after moving to an in-person office

Now that the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic seems to be behind us, many companies are considering the idea of bringing remote employees back to the office. However, making the change is more complicated than just flipping a switch. Many employees have grown accustomed to spending more time at home with their families, and some people are still worried about catching the virus. Thus, you need to handle the situation properly or your employees may not agree to return. At the very least, they will be unhappy and, in turn, less productive.

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This article will cover why it's a good decision to return to the traditional in-office work environment and how you can create a positive environment that will take away some of the anxiety that your employees may face.

Why you should bring employees back

There are many benefits to remote work. In addition to the fact that employees have no commute, more freedom with their wardrobe, and more time with their loved ones, there have also been studies that show that working at home can make some remote employees more productive. However, that is not the case for everyone, and there are downsides to consider as well.

In the beginning, it may be exciting to work from the comfort of our own homes, but studies show that the excitement could eventually wear off. People need to feel like they are part of a community and working in the office, surrounded by coworkers, can make an employee feel great comfort. Many people who work from home can begin to experience psychological symptoms, such as feelings of loneliness and anxiety because they are working alone and don't have that same connection. Employees who are stressed and uneasy every day will also likely be less productive.

The effect on the company should also be considered. When employees are isolated from each other, they also lose the ability to grow as a team. Without seeing a coworker excel in their job, another employee might now know what they need to do to improve their own productivity. Short-term projects see a rise in completion from remote workers, but long-term projects that need more finesse and collaboration can falter. Working together can also create a healthy sense of competition that could boost efficiency throughout the team. There is a reason why working in an office has been the norm all of these years, and returning is likely to help your business.

Talk to them

While many employees will come willingly, others will be more hesitant because they have gotten used to remote work and the comfort it provides. Instead of just sending out a memo requiring the employees to return on a certain date, management and HR departments should reach out to each employee and listen to their needs and concerns. Some employees may be concerned about catching illnesses, while others may not feel mentally prepared to return. Listen to what they have to say and take the appropriate actions.

If possible, you can consider a hybrid arrangement to reintegrate

employees into the office. A hybrid work model is where your employees can spend a portion of the week at the office and the other part at home. This is a good way to ease your staff back into the office without making the experience too jarring. During the days that they are in the office, you should have your meetings and team-building exercises so the employees can reconnect and rebuild those relationships.

It can be taxing for some people to come back to work after facing a global pandemic, so be sure that you offer mental health services that employees can take advantage of if they need them. The services might include the option to speak to a therapist or to take a mental health day if necessary. Your company can also offer free phone apps that help with sleep and stress reduction or provide yoga and meditation classes at work. By showing your employees that you care about their well-being, they will be more eager to return.

Returning to a suitable environment

Even though the pandemic seems to be in the rear-view mirror, there is still a chance of contracting the disease or others like it. Companies need to remain vigilant and protect their staff. Advise your team of the safety precautions that you are taking at the office, and make sure to follow through on what you promise so employees feel comfortable coming back to work.

Start by ensuring that your employees are able to properly socially distance themselves from each other and customers. If space is limited, then you may be able to make different arrangements. Prepare your team for in-office situations in this new environment by putting up plastic dividers or rearranging the desks so employees aren't facing each other. If your work allows it, then also consider providing alternating shifts so all of your employees aren't there at the same time.

Also, ensure that there is a clean office environment. All bathrooms and kitchens should be equipped with soap and hand sanitiser dispensers, and employees should be permitted to wash their hands whenever necessary. Wipe down every surface at night. Be sure to refer to any applicable state guidelines as well.

As you can see, there are plenty of ways that you can support your employees while moving back to the office. Take it one step at a time and listen to your staff, and you can all return to a happy and efficient workplace.

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