Considerations for Returning to a Healthy Workplace

A Checklist for Preparing the Workplace for Your Employees

The transition back to the office post Covid-19 will not be business-as-usual. An organization's successful return to work will take time and a thoughtful approach that addresses changes in people's habits and behaviors and well as company spaces and procedures.

Every organization's return to the office will be different and should be customized based on their culture, objectives and workstyles. To guide the planning process, we have assembled a checklist of categories and items that organizations should consider.

Change Management and Coaching

+ Develop your plan-of-action well in advance of return dates

+ Create a "Return to the Workplace" steering committee. Include members from HR, Communications, Facilities, etc.

+ Obtain buy-in and support on the strategy from senior leadership

+ Recruit change "champions"

+ Coach and train supervisors and managers to help them succeed in their key roles as change agents. Ask them to:
   - Set expectations
   - Model behaviors
   - Foster a team spirit

Communication and Outreach

+ Establish a clear communication strategy and schedule to keep employees up-to-date, include:
   - Steps you are taking to assure them of a healthy environment
   - New workplace policies and protocols
   - Frequently asked questions
   - Point/s of contact for questions, concerns

+ Establish a help line and/or use change champions to direct employees to additional information and resources

+ Take the pulse of the organization by gathering input from employees through surveys and focus groups for their readiness and/or willingness to work onsite

+ Craft an office etiquette guide for employees to clearly communicate new protocols and procedures

+ Continually monitor progress and how employees are adapting via surveys, town halls or other listening forums

+ Keep an open dialogue to maintain ongoing communication

+ Provide training updates as policies and protocols change

Working from Home and Flexible Work Strategies

+ Stagger return to the office in stages

+ Alternate workdays/weeks for teams (A/B)

+ Utilize employee surveys, productivity data or other measures to guide planning for which teams to bring back in early stages

+ Review video conferencing technology and media guidelines and capabilities

+ Consider providing a stipend to employees for furniture to help work from home. (i.e. monitor arm; ergonomic task chair; height-adjustable tables)

Day-to-Day Considerations and Protocols

+ Establish screening procedures for employees, visitors and contractors, such as temperature checks, health assessments or travel history

+ Review visitor protocol and consider controlling access or limiting number of daily visitors

+ Post visible protocol reminders (wash hands, keep social distance, cover sneeze, stay home when sick, etc.)

+ Provide personal mugs and water bottles and dishwashers with Sani-wash cycles

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+ Consider making Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as face masks and gloves, available to employees and visitors

+ Review your snack, food and beverage protocols. Consider pre-packaged, grab-and-go items

+ If you are in a multi-tenant building, review building management guidelines for common areas

Distancing and Separation Opportunities

+ Provide enclosures or delineate space at workspaces

  - Add screens to workstations

  - Reduce number of workstation seats in the open office

  - Rearrange workspaces so employees are not face-to-face

+ Remove or reduce reception area seating

+ Reduce number of seats in meeting rooms, cafes and other shared spaces and post signage with the maximum occupancy

+ Incorporate soft architectural solutions—wall systems, drapery, screens—around open collaboration areas

+ Create traffic patterns in your circulation, mandating a directional flow through the office

+ Implement social distancing queues in traffic areas such as pantry, lobby, elevator vestibule

Use of Shared Spaces, Tools and Objects

+ Assign seats and storage for individuals

+ Alter refuge, phone rooms and other small meeting spaces to dedicated individual offices

+ Dedicate meeting rooms and neighborhoods to teams as well as specific rooms to use for vistors

+ Consider replacing some traditional seated-meeting spaces with high-top tables and chairs for perching

+ Review your shared seating options, consider adding armless seating choices for less physical contact

+ Provide personal phones, electronics and equipment to eliminate sharing

+ Make all collaborations spaces bookable to allow time to clean between each use.

+ Add sensors and no-touch technology for hands-free operation of doors, garbage/recycling bins, elevators, etc.

+ If no-touch technology is not an option, consider pulling out and exposing any concealed garbage/recycling bins, keeping all non-security doors open and creating traffic patterns in stairways, etc. to minimize physical touch points

Indoor Environmental Quality

+ When possible arrange areas to provide well-lit spaces with daylight and nature views

+ Review indoor air quality systems and procedures:

  - Assure that ventilation keeps clean air flowing in and helps direct air down

  - Evaluate current HVAC systems

+ Add plants wherever possible

Office Cleanliness

+ Add a robust and regular cleaning protocol, including daily day- and night-time cleanings and scheduled deep cleanings, like electro-static cleaning

  - Collect and be prepared to follow cleaning instructions from product manufacturer

+ Establish a clean desk/clean meeting space policy to enable a cleaning crew to thoroughly clean all desks and spaces

+ Specify fabric and finishes with antimicrobial properties and/or bleach-cleanable surfaces

+ Supply hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes throughout the office, especially in high-traffic areas like reception areas, exits, stairs, restrooms, elevators, etc.

+ Provide each employee with individual cleaning materials and a place to store them

+ Recommend that employees wipe individual desks down at the beginning and/or end of each day and shared spaces at the beginning and/or end of each use

+ Include appropriate areas for disposing wipes and other cleaning materials