

## Member's Quarterly

Summer 2020 Edition

### Feature

# Managing the Unknown Back-to-Work Climate

*Start planning now for the new normal*



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**Y**ou got the memo, email or the phone call telling you to come back to work on Monday. Now what? Are track pants and jeans nixed?

Are you excited, anxious, scared or worried? Probably all of these emotions are coming up for you. Or are you saying to yourself (a new habit): *'finally, I get to see my colleagues.'*

What will the first day back be like in the field? As a manager, what should you say? What should your employees expect of you? Will it be business as usual? Normal or a new normal? These questions spin around all of our minds as we anticipate that day.

The good news is that many of the same principles and tools we use in workplace restoration may be applied.

### Start with calming over-anticipation

- Stress may increase your anxiety so be proactive in lowering stress levels.
- Thinking, *'There is nothing I can do, and that feels horrible?'* Remember that you are not helpless.
- Change your negative thoughts from 'what if' to a positive 'how do I?'
- Unfollow negative social media channels or even those stuck in the same thought space. Mute toxic messages. Minimize or stop watching the news.
- Visit with friends via Zoom, Skype or WhatsApp.
- Take advantage of this time. Have you said, *'I wish I had more time to spend with my family, exercise, meditate or clean out those drawers...?'* Guess what? Wish granted!

### Move into preparing for what you do know now

It may seem far away now, but getting your workplace to be a place where employees are happy to return to work starts with planning now.

Systematic and progressive work will create an environment where people are eager to communicate with their colleagues, feel empowered to bring forth new ideas and give their best every day and into the future.

Remember that anytime significant changes take place in the workplace, relationships may have been strained or fragmented. Teams may find they are no longer able to work well together. Restoration helps to restore good relations.

So start working on the following before the 'return to workplace' call arrives.

### Improve role clarity

It is natural for an employee to feel challenged because another employee was doing "their" work. Another common scenario includes two employees blaming each other for work that was not done, each thinking the other was responsible. Clarifying roles through improved job descriptions, procedures, flow charts and planned discussions between employees and management can address these issues.

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#### Enhance your policies

Review current policies and consider implementing companion policies to address the new normal. Consider developing a Positive Workplace Policy.

#### Physical Layout

Recognizing that social isolating is considered a mental trauma, look at your office configuration. Do you need to provide more space for people or more privacy? Can you accommodate that at the workplace or provide work-at-home alternatives?

#### Brush up on your managerial people skills

**Change Management** The fear and uncertainty associated with change can lead to competitiveness, gossiping, negativity and other team dysfunctions. Adopt good change management practices and consider engaging a change management professional for coaching. Excellent people skills include:

- Involving employees from the outset of any change initiative, not only to give them a voice but also to enable them to prepare for the different working environment;
- Frequently communicating, even (or especially) when you may not have an answer;
- Supporting staff to understand how the modification will affect them;
- Showing your sincerity – do not pretend that something negative will be a positive automatically; and
- Giving employees time to adapt to the new change.

Remember that this time is a moment to reflect, rebuild and reconnect. Dealing with the unknown back-to-work climate requires energy, flexibility and stamina. Start preparing now so you will have the tools and skills you and your team need to succeed.

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