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COVID-19 EMPLOYEE REINTEGRATION

A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR SAFE, SENSIBLE, AND EFFICIENT WAYS TO WELCOME EMPLOYEES BACK TO THE OFFICE

Presented by: SelfHelpWorks.com & MedProWellness.com
Navigating the post-COVID-19 world has been a daunting task for business leaders across the globe. Countless financial, logistical, and operational decisions had to be made swiftly, and without precedent.

Companies have been forced to re-evaluate product offerings, change entire business models, and make staffing reductions they would never have considered prior to the pandemic.

The enormity of the situation has been made even more complex by the mental and emotional challenges employees are experiencing.

While eager to get ‘back to business’, the prospect of returning to a largely different environment than the one they left has gripped many with fear, uncertainty, and anxiety.

These employees — the backbone of any great company — need to be prioritized, and treated with empathy, care, and support, as they adapt to this new normal.
PHASE I: PREPARE

Develop a plan for how and when employees can safely return to the office, balancing safety and financial implications with the health and wellness needs of employees.
CREATE A RE-ENTRY TASK FORCE

This is a critical time to begin assembling a team who will work to strategize and implement necessary changes. Priority should be given not only to the physical workplace, but to the psychological and emotional support employees will undoubtedly need.

Both technical and soft skills will be important traits to look for when selecting individuals to be a part of this team. There will be both broad-based issues and department-specific concerns to address, which make company-wide representation essential.

Consulting with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), local authorities, and industry-specific organizations for key information and dates will be the first step in putting together a strategic plan.

Additionally, crisis/emergency management experts may be valuable to consult with for further guidance.
First, look to your current workspace and begin to redefine/reconfigure to allow for de-densification. Companies with satellite offices in suburbs and smaller cities may look to those spaces as temporary or permanent work locations to avoid some of the challenges present in larger cities. If that’s not an option for your organization, now is the time to consider:

- **Repositioning** office furniture such as desks, chairs and seating areas to allow for social distancing

- **Possible closures** for common areas including kitchens, gyms, cafeterias, reception, etc.

- **Incorporating** ‘touchless’ technology where possible for doors, elevators, trash receptacles, restrooms and more
In these unprecedented times, employees must be afforded access to stress management/resiliency tools to help them adapt to their ‘new normal.’ These can include virtual health and wellness offerings, like those available from MedPro Wellness and SelfHelpWorks, online fitness classes, counseling services, and a library of resources with self-guided techniques such as deep breathing, stretching, and taking quiet time to focus.

Separately, training your leadership team to identify signs of employee stress is imperative in helping them lead with compassion and empathy.

Other suggestions include:

- **Encouraging employees to “reframe” obstacles** – the process of viewing problems through a different lens

- **Maintaining structure** – keeping the workplace organized, consistent, and predictable

- **Providing positive feedback** and helping employees focus on what’s going right

- **Offering an open-door policy** where those struggling are encouraged to ask for help
Finally, consider creating flexible new policies to help employees juggle demands they may currently be facing - such as reduced childcare, commuting challenges, and greater responsibilities for elderly and high-risk family members.

For employees continuing to work from home, create a “best practices” toolkit, ensuring social concerns such as isolation and loneliness are addressed.
ENHANCE CLEANING & SAFETY INSPECTIONS

Enhance/refine cleaning schedules to ensure janitorial staff will effectively and frequently disinfect high-touch surfaces.

Provide frequent safety inspections gauging air quality, water, HVAC systems, etc.

From an employee standpoint:

- **Procure “care kits” to include essential items** – disposable masks, hand sanitizer and disinfecting wipes for their personal workspaces

- **Print & display informational signage** throughout workspaces to communicate hygiene guidelines as well as other new requirements and restrictions

- **Determine a phased approach** to when employees will return to office with essential workers and non-vulnerable staff coming in first

- **Consider shift work** – e.g. morning vs. afternoon to stagger arrival/departure times and allow for greater distancing measures and cleaning/disinfecting throughout the day
DETERMINE COMPANY-WIDE GUIDELINES & RESTRICTIONS

Existing guidelines will need to be updated in accordance with governmental and industry-specific mandates. Additional considerations may include:

- **Transportation to office** – offering company-subsidized shuttles, driving/parking allowances to accommodate those with commuting challenges, flexible schedules or partial work from home

- **Travel** – Domestic and International

- **Off-site** client meetings

- **Internal** meetings

- **Social** events

- **Lunch/errands** outside of office

- **Consider sourcing** partner vendors who can deliver food and toiletry items to avoid non-essential trips
Prepare protocols in the event emergency closing is needed; consider creating an emergency task force.
Communication will play a significant role in easing the fears and concerns of returning employees.

From providing them with a sense of security about enhanced safety measures, to assuring them that their health and well-being will be prioritized, this next phase of the plan is paramount in instilling employee confidence.

By setting realistic expectations and being fully transparent, workers will feel a shared sense of accountability in re-entry success.
Determine if training will be company-wide or broken into smaller, departmental sessions to allow for an extensive Q&A period. Accept there will be many questions and concerns and be prepared to answer as clearly and thoroughly as possible. Consider input/suggestions from employees to fine-tune guidelines prior to return to office.

Encourage employees to be candid about any struggles they may be experiencing and assign key contacts for follow-up questions or concerns. It’s important to recognize and communicate that productivity dips will be expected as employees acclimate to their ‘new normal’ and break any stigmas previously held regarding job/performance-related stress.
PROVIDE FOLLOW UP FAQ SHEET WHICH MAY INCLUDE:

- **Rendering** of new floorplan if applicable

- **Timeline** of when specific employees will return and a proposed description of the re-entry process e.g.
  - Arrival/departure time
  - Employee credentials required
  - Safety measures including temperature checks
  - New guidelines/restrictions as well as workarounds
  - Stress management resources
While many employees were forced to create makeshift home offices, it's vital to ensure the viability of their current workspaces as a long-term solution. Additional support should be provided for employees who may be dealing with a sense of loss from missing the physical presence of their colleagues.

If the scope of certain positions have changed, now is the time to share updated key documents.
PHASE III: ACTIVATE

Bring employees back to the office in a safe manner, being respectful and responsive to the unique stressors they are likely to be experiencing.
The greatest importance in handling change, especially on such a large-scale, is the ability to be resilient and manage stress. While many successful individuals have used techniques like exercise and meditation in the past, the magnitude of this pandemic have left even the most confident and grounded employees feeling confused and uncertain.

Through stress management and resilience training programs like LivingEasy, we can help your team thrive in these unprecedented times. Having spent years working with organizations to deliver stress management and resilience training to their employees, we are well-equipped to help individuals live without fear.

Designed by experts in collaboration with the University of Texas, it’s been the trusted choice of Fortune 100 companies for years with 96% of participants saying they’d recommend it to others.

The self-guided program, accessible virtually via any device, keeps participants engaged and provides step-by-step training to improve resiliency and effectively take control of stressful situations. Enrollment is confidential, encouraging individuals to engage without worrying about social or professional stigmas.
FOCUS ON POSITIVE CHANGES

Empower your staff to tap into their entrepreneurial spirit and look to current obstacles instead as opportunities to refine the workplace of the future. Additionally, offer greater autonomy to both aid in efficiency and lessen in-person interactions.

STAY NIMBLE

Continue to provide flexibility in terms of your re-entry plan, adjusting and adapting as necessary. Your employees are the front-line of your organization and can provide valuable insight into what’s working and what isn’t. Be open to new ideas especially regarding scheduling for employees who may be dealing with pandemic-related challenges.
Teams were disbanded, virtually overnight. Think about innovative ways to bring your teams back together – even if remotely – and maintain a positive attitude and renewed sense of team spirit.
Preparing for re-entry at your place of business is an overwhelming task – and there are numerous decisions you'll need to make along the way. Helping your employees is one burden we can help support you with as you begin your journey to reopening.

**Schedule a call with one of our experts** for a virtual demonstration of our best-in-class solutions and consider these guidelines as you begin to plan for your company’s next steps.
WHO ARE WE?

MedPro Wellness and SelfHelpWorks, pioneers in the health behavior change space, can help your employees thrive, as others merely survive the what’s next.

Even with the obvious hurdles ahead, we can work with your team to help refine, refocus and embrace the future.

While change of this magnitude can feel overwhelming, it has reinforced what good leaders already know — change is inevitable. It’s a narrative we’re well poised to tell because we’ve lived and breathed it since our inception.

Through tools we’ve made available, we can help your organization keep employee stress to a minimum and build resiliency — key for an optimal re-opening and long-term success.