

The HR Leader's Guide to Supporting Employees Returning to the Workplace



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In a post-pandemic world, the workplace will look very different, especially when it comes to how organizations will engage employees during times of change.

Curfews, restrictions, and various lockdowns have undoubtedly hit your workforce hard throughout 2020 and 2021 as COVID-19 infections rose. However, as the U.S. begins to reopen and regulations loosen up, companies are now looking to return to a semblance of normalcy they enjoyed pre-pandemic.

This creates an exciting opportunity for you as an HR leader to support your employees as they start to return to the workplace, either in a full time capacity or as part of a hybrid work model.

As a reminder or for those unfamiliar with this term, hybrid work models enable some employees to work remotely while others work on site. Some organizations are adopting flexible work arrangements to permit their workforce to work some days at home and some days in the office.

These models can provide a number of advantages if properly implemented. These include the ability to hire top talent across the world while reducing overhead, providing options to fit each individual's preferences, and decrease health risks. And most importantly, employees prefer this model – [52% of workers](#) prefer a more flexible working model following the pandemic.

As employees begin to return to the office, you will need a plan in place for making them feel safe and to show them how you will support their overall wellbeing so that ultimately they can continue to be happy, healthy, and productive members of your organization.

“**Working remotely for more than a year, it's become clear that our employees have enjoyed the freedom of a more flexible work environment and are just as productive at home. A hybrid working model will allow us to provide them this benefit while also providing the office as a place to collaborate and build relationships.”**

– Nikki Salenetri, VP, Human Resources
at Gympass



How to Support Employees Returning to the Workplace



As an HR leader, you should start thinking about how you and your team can be proactive in helping your staff each step of the way as they transition back to the office. It's important to consider their perspective as they adjust to the new normal.

As things stand, employees today [have a lot of concerns](#) when it comes to returning to on-site work, including:

45% Worsening their work-life balance

42% Decreasing focus on employee well-being

44% Increasing their chances of getting sick

39% Having worse flexibility in their day-to-day work

To successfully bring your employees back on site (either full-time or in a hybrid capacity), consider these actionable tips.

Adhere to up-to-date government guidelines.

Pay close attention to government advisories on how to prevent the spread of illnesses in your workplace. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) outlines some very useful [considerations for people returning to work](#).

Make it clear to your staff exactly how you're keeping your workplace safe and clean. Provide them with details on how you're following preventive measures, like providing hand sanitizer, staggering in-office days for each team to maintain social distancing, hiring cleaning companies to disinfect regularly, and providing masks in the office.

In any case, consult with your employment council to understand all measurements to maintain a safe work environment. This can give your employees peace of mind and show them that you're taking their health seriously.

Establish open communication channels.

Develop a communication plan that outlines all expectations for employees, and encourage transparency and open communication across the board. You want your employees to feel

comfortable in expressing their concerns, and they should have direct contact with someone who can address those concerns.

Simply put, your team wants to feel included in company communications about the future of the organization after the pandemic. In fact, those who do feel included thanks to detailed communication about policies are about [five times more likely](#) to report increased productivity.

Establish concrete dates for employees to return to the office well in advance so they can start arranging for important lifestyle changes such as daycare and pet care.

Don't forget that it will be important to provide accommodations to fit the individual needs of your employees too. If some people are in high risk categories and still don't feel comfortable returning to the office, coordinate with their team leaders and see if there is a flexible work arrangement that fits both the employee and the team.

Keep culture and recognition top of mind.

Cultivating and maintaining a positive workplace culture is hard enough in the office. So when teams are physically separated, this can become even more of a challenge.

However, your company's culture should be considered a top priority. If your employees feel disconnected from each other and their team, they're going to feel left out, which can hurt [productivity](#), engagement, and [retention](#). Find a way to make all employees (those in office and those working from home) feel recognized and valued.

Your employee recognition program needs to be fair for all teams. So if you're hosting team meetings with in-office and remote workers, praise all key players equally, no matter where they're working from. These can be virtual shout outs in your team chat groups or larger gestures, like mailing remote employees recognition gifts, such as lunch delivered by a local restaurant or a thank you card with a gift card.

Also, make time for hybrid culture events. These can be video chat calls where teams gather and play fun games, like trivia, would you rather, charades, and two truths and a lie. You can also host happy hours where employees can socialize and engage in fun group conversations.

Build a holistic employee wellbeing program that is accessible.

Employee wellness is increasingly a major area of focus for employers, especially in the wake of a global pandemic. There is strong evidence showing how [stress can weaken the immune system](#) and how [sedentary lifestyles](#) contribute to a slew of health issues.



Creating a wellness program demonstrates that you are invested in your employees wellbeing, both in and outside of the workplace. Our employees have been appreciative of having a wellbeing solution that offers a way for them to take care of their mental and physical health during the difficult and stressful time of COVID.”

– Nikki Salenetri, VP, Human Resources at Gympass



This is why developing an employee wellness program is so important. Not only will you help your employees stay healthy and happy, but you can also improve their levels of engagement, productivity, and satisfaction. Plus, when you support them in improving their health, you're sending a clear message: You care for them on a human level.

Here are some tips for managing an effective employee wellness program:

- 1** Start with health assessments to gauge employee interests and identify common risks you can address with specific types of programs (e.g. a smoking cessation program).
- 2** Establish clear goals with your leadership team (e.g. reduce absenteeism, increase employee retention), then set up a reporting process to track progress.
- 3** Earn full buy-in from your leadership team and make it known to your employees so they see the enthusiasm and support from all levels of the organization.
- 4** Start an employee-led wellness committee that helps foster a wellness culture by promoting your program and assisting in implementation.
- 5** Set a budget that includes costs associated with wellness program items, including tools and resources, promotional materials, screening fees, and fitness trackers.
- 6** Finalize wellness program components, like which platforms your employees will use and what kinds of screenings and programs they want to participate in.
- 7** Promote your program and provide specific rewards and incentives to ensure utilization rates are high.

Gympass: The solution that supports all employees returning to the workplace

Fortunately, thanks to multi-option wellness solutions like Gympass, you can provide variety and flexibility to employees, no matter your work model. Whether you're leading fully remote teams, hybrid teams, or on-site, Gympass is your go-to solution for improving wellness.

Learn more about how Gympass is the most complete corporate wellbeing platform, with a results-driven strategy and inclusive plans that will meet the unique needs of all your employees.

[Learn More](#)

