

# Gympass

**Your Guide to  
Asking the  
Right Questions  
as Your Workplace  
Continues to Reopen**





# You're Reopening the Workplace. Now What?

The question among most U.S. employers and employees has shifted from “When will we return to the office?” to “How will we return to the office?” Now, another question is equally important: “What’s most important for HR and other leaders as we continue to reopen?”

Gartner has reported that 1.1 billion employees worldwide worked from home in 2020. That’s more than triple the number in 2019. More to the point of this guide, Gartner says 60% of companies around the world are developing a permanent hybrid-work model as the pandemic wanes. The record number of people quitting their jobs, combined with more jobs becoming available as the economy reopens, has made it even more crucial for HR leaders and their executive teams to get it right as they’re faced with attracting new talent and retaining their most valued workers.





**How can you “get it right”?** It’s important to first ask the right questions about how to thrive amid the uncertainty and new arrangements of reopening. And for optimal success and culture-building, you need to make sure you’re including everyone in the conversation.

This guide doesn’t have all the answers, but it does offer the best questions to ask in three overarching categories as you reopen your workplace:

**1**

**How Will You Best Support Your People?**

**2**

**Are You Listening?**

**3**

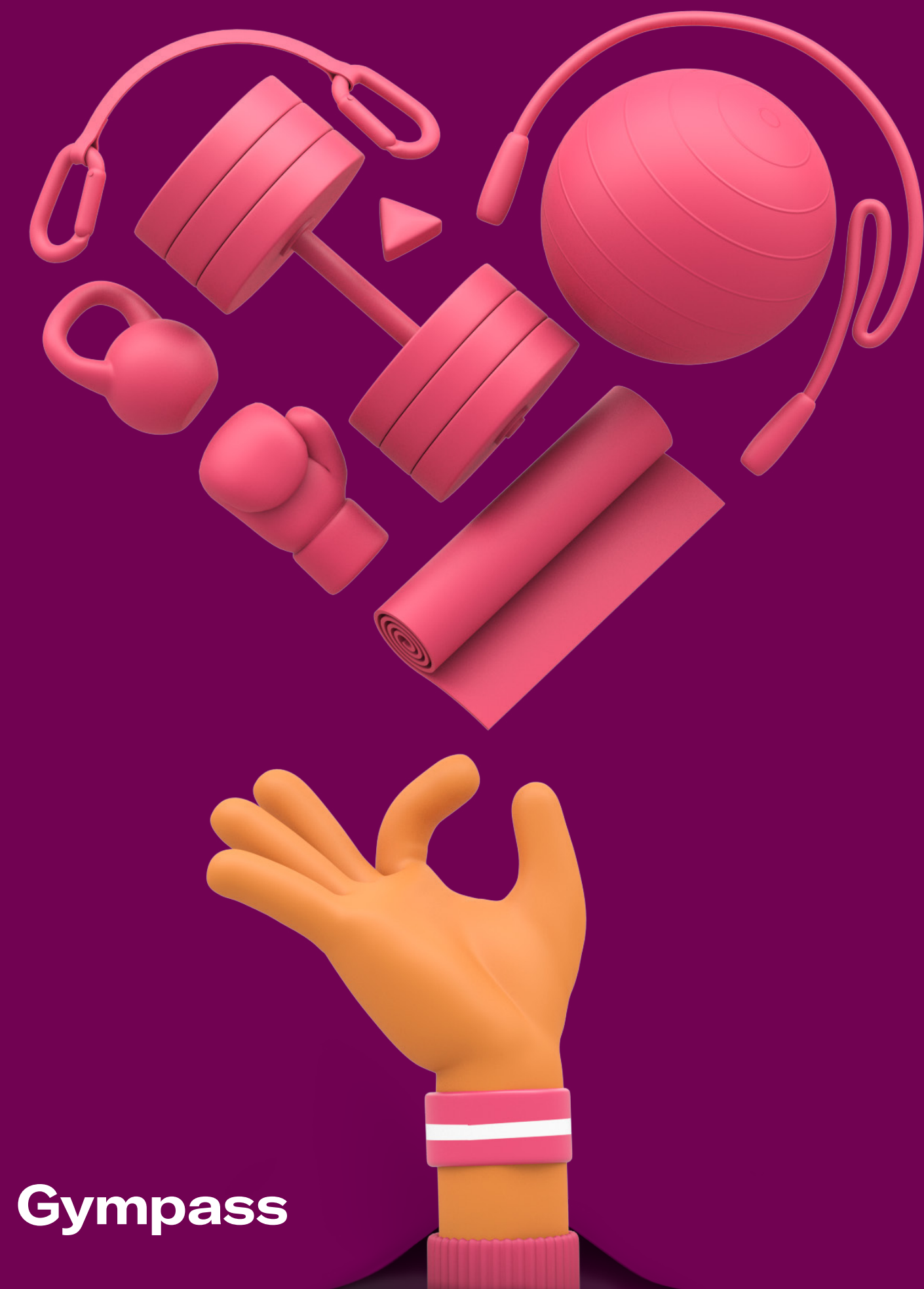
**What About the Road Ahead?**

# 1

## How Will You Best Support Your People and Your Leadership?

What changes in benefits and work styles do your people need to stay with you, be comfortable at work, and feel supported now that they're returning to the workplace? How do you provide those and also align with your organization's strategic goals and culture?

You need to be asking the right questions to get a clear picture of how to support your workforce and meet the goals and the expectations of the C-suite now that reopening has begun.





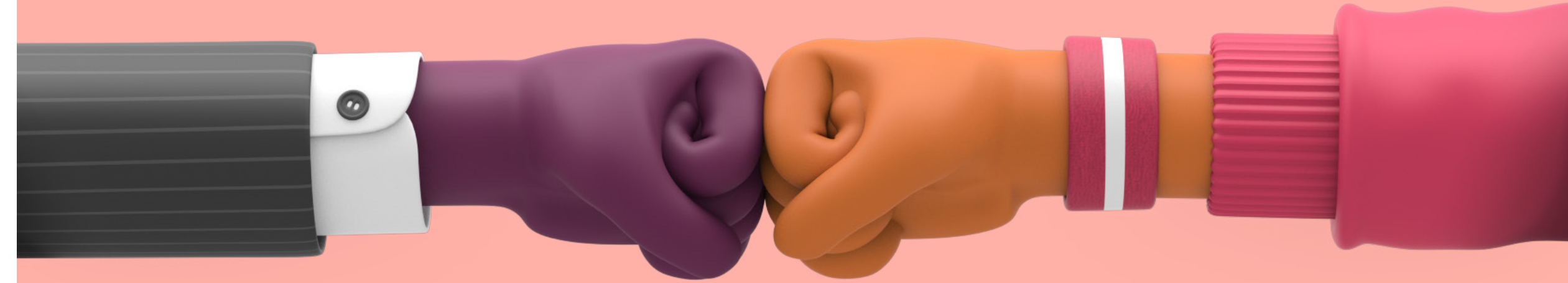
# Questions to ask to best support your people and your leadership

## **What is the C-suite's sentiment toward workplace flexibility going forward – now that the return to the workplace has begun?**

Do you have a clear understanding of how senior leadership views the evolution of the workplace over the next three to six months? Next year? The next three years?

## **What is the employee sentiment toward future workplace flexibility?**

[Research from Motus](#), a workforce management software company, says 40% of Generation Z and millennial professionals want the [flexibility to choose where they work](#) from now going forward. Recent [research from LiveCareer](#) found that nearly 30% of remote workers say they'll quit if they can't continue working remotely. Another two-thirds say they would prefer to work only for companies that offer options for remote work.



FlexJobs, a job listings platform, puts the number even higher. As reported on [EBN online](#), FlexJobs research says almost 60% of employees say they would quit their job if they're forced to return to the office.

## **Are you up to date and staying current on compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and other Equal Employment Opportunity laws?**

Regulations that cover the workplace are constantly shifting. It's important to know you're complying as more workers return to the workplace, while employees continue to suffer from stress and fear.

**Have you considered offering or continuing remote work arrangements, or are you exploring alternative responsibilities that can be performed remotely for people who need to continue working from home?**

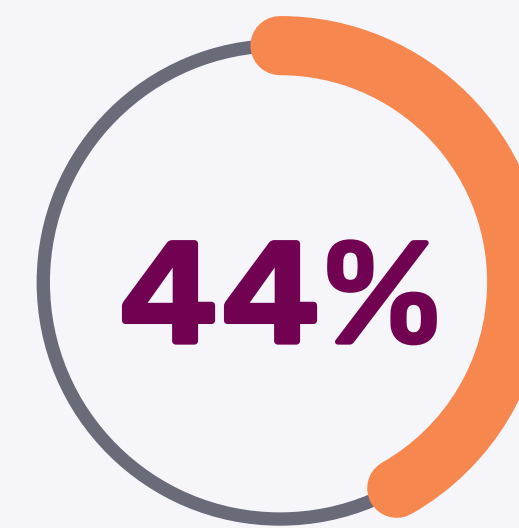
[Reasonable accommodations](#) – which can include telework – must be made under the ADA for qualifying reasons. HR will likely need to continue reviewing and implementing ADA accommodations, for example, for employees who are unable or uncomfortable returning to an office.

**Have you updated your leave policies and how you manage them to reflect a post-pandemic world?**

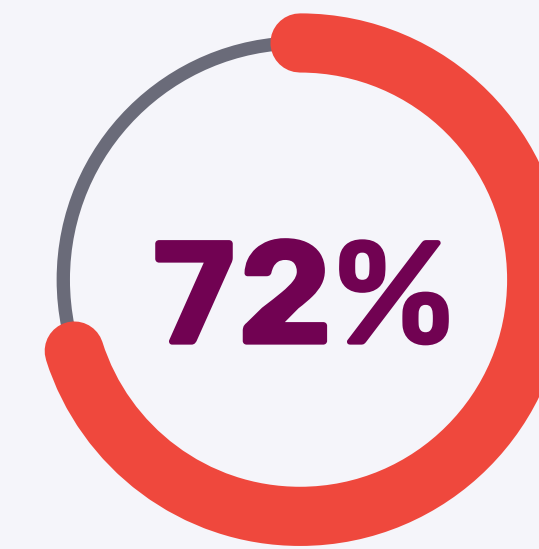
While employers are no longer legally obligated to provide paid sick leave or emergency Family and Medical Leave for coronavirus-related absences, many employers are continuing to offer extended leave or flexible work arrangements. Additionally, employers can still receive a tax credit if they continue to voluntarily provide paid coronavirus-related leave under the [American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\)](#) through Sept. 30, 2021.

To hire the best and boost retention, you need to be sure your leave policies give employees more support, stay current with state and federal laws, and help you optimally manage unspent PTO or vacation days that employees have accumulated during the pandemic.

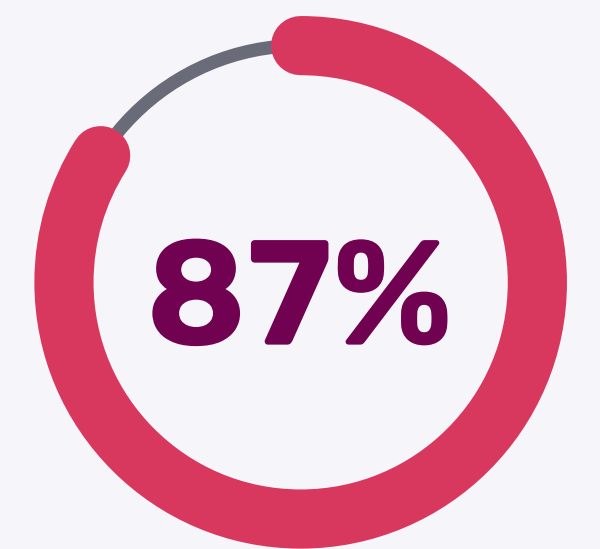
Last summer, 44% of U.S. employees didn't use any paid time off, although 72% wanted to take a vacation, according to data from ValuePenguin and reported by [SHRM](#). Today's a new day: 87% of Americans are expected to take a trip this summer, according to [Destination Analysts](#).



**Employees who did not use any PTO last summer**



**Employees who wanted to take vacation last summer**



**Employees expected to take vacation this summer**





### **Do you need to provide continued or new support for child care?**

Working parents had to juggle their jobs and caregiving during the pandemic, and employers took note. [Working moms](#) felt the worst impact. Many employers responded with new childcare benefits, including backup child care and stipends for college counseling services and tutoring. [Bright Horizons](#), a national chain of preschools and early education centers, said more than 100 of its new clients added backup care benefits last year.

You need to know the support for child care your organization currently offers, as well as learn what working parents need or want to continue being productive and engaged as you continue to reopen. How many will quit if they can't work from home, who are they, and how can you accommodate them?

### **Are you offering a holistic wellbeing solution, one that supports employees physically, emotionally, and mentally?**

The pandemic not only changed the way we work, it's changed how [employees think about their benefits](#). More employees are seeking workplaces that demonstrate purpose, meaning, and empathy. Many employers are successfully responding by adopting a holistic approach to benefits. They're focusing beyond traditional core healthcare benefits and embracing voluntary benefits that encompass wellness, lifestyle, and (perhaps most crucially) mental health benefits to ease continued employee stress.

With [annual benefits enrollment](#) nearly upon us, and the world and the workplace continuing to reopen amid continued uncertainty and fear, savvy employers are continuing to shift their priorities away from the basic "core" benefits. Now they're looking for empathic and insightful solutions that focus on needs that the pandemic brought to the forefront, for total wellbeing and especially for [employee mental health](#).





# 2

## Are You (Still) Listening?

Is your feedback loop intact and operating optimally? Now more than ever, HR needs to be using the 360-degree listening method – seeking input and feedback from company executives, from their own team members and peers, and from employees.

Ongoing returning-to-work surveys will help you understand what you need to prioritize. Among the many things you need to consider is the mental state of your employees and their need for programs to support them personally and professionally.



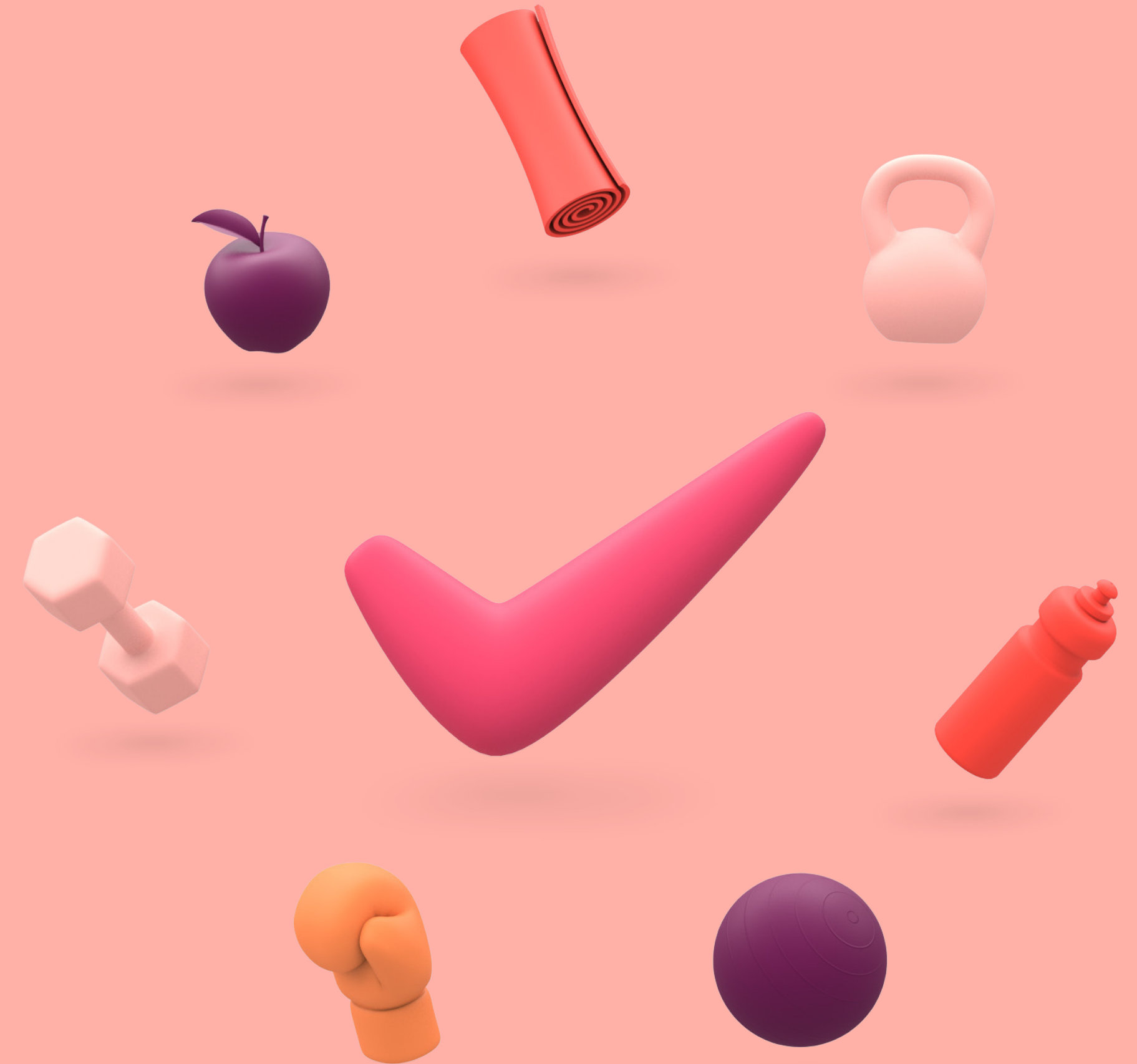
# Questions to ask to be sure you're connected with your people and your leadership

## Do employees need to be reassured?

Some employees will have been working from home while others may have been home on furlough. Even as you've reopened your workplace, you need to understand and be prepared to address employee concerns and fears about everything from the reopening plan to COVID-19 infection rates. People who are nervous must be reassured that you're doing everything you can to keep things safe.

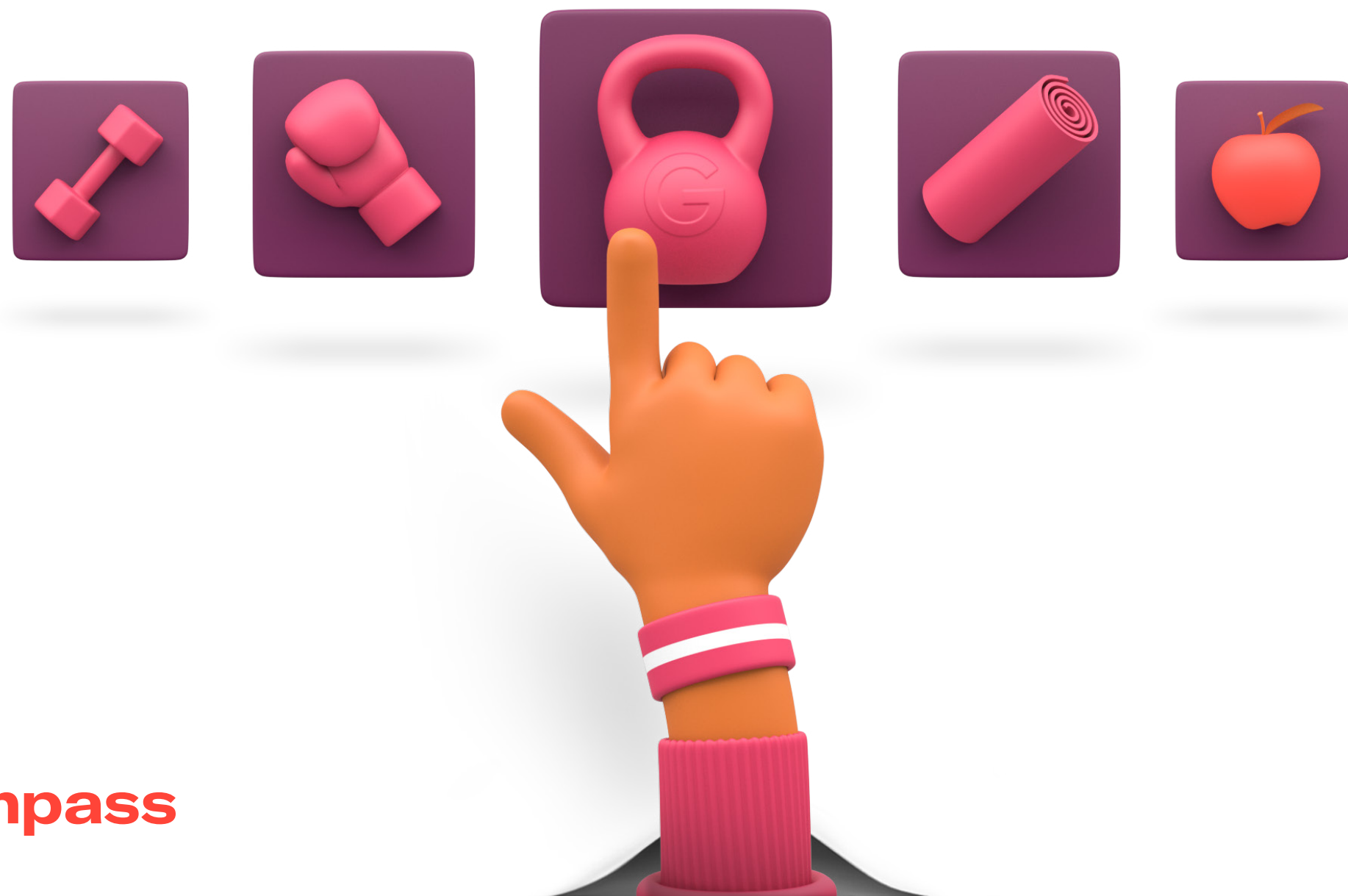
## If you have a hybrid work model, are you making sure all of your people have the tools they need to be engaged, productive, and able to collaborate effectively?

The hybrid work model is gaining traction quickly. It's important to routinely [survey your employees](#) about their work experience, to maximize the benefits of the model while minimizing the downsides.



## How are managers adapting performance goals to take into consideration the new work model or a return to the old model?

The pandemic so dramatically shifted the landscape of work and how work gets done that employers worldwide and in nearly every industry either put their standard performance reviews on hold last year or altered them significantly to account for the disruption. Now's a good time to take a fresh look at the factors still impacting performance reviews and consider suggestions for supporting managers and employees in the return to this necessity of traditional work life.



**Assessing for effective communication will dictate whether your work model is functioning optimally or needs to be revised.**

## How do employees feel about communication with their managers right now?

With so much change happening, it's critical to keep your pulse on the relationship between managers and their team members, whether employees are working from home or in the workplace. Assessing for effective communication will dictate whether your work model is functioning optimally or needs to be revised.

## How do employees feel about what's down the road for the workplace and your company's plan if COVID-19 rates rise again?

You need to understand how motivated people are not only to return to the workplace, but to stay with you, whether that's because they've enjoyed working from home or because they are disappointed by the decision to furlough them.





# 3

## What About the Road Ahead?

How are you preparing to monitor and make adjustments for life after employees return to the workplace? HR will need to continue to monitor risk and staff absences, and have plans in place for managing staff absences, including flexible leave policies.

# Questions to ask to be prepared for the road ahead

## **How will you ensure affected workers have sufficient paid leave to observe a quarantine period or are able to stay home as indicated?**

Variants of the COVID-19 virus are continuing to spread, even among fully vaccinated members of the workforce. You need to have plans in place for employees who are infected and need to quarantine. It's best to be prepared now, to avoid confusion and lost productivity later.

## **What process will you use to continue to monitor sick absences, but expand sick leave provisions to allow employees to stay at home if ill and to care for sick family members?**

Many employers expanded time-off policies during the pandemic to allow employees to stay home and care for sick family members. It's a trend that is likely to continue even as your organization returns to work. To accurately assess your leave policies and measure their costs, you'll need to separately track routine sick absences and absences that accrue for employees taking care of family members.

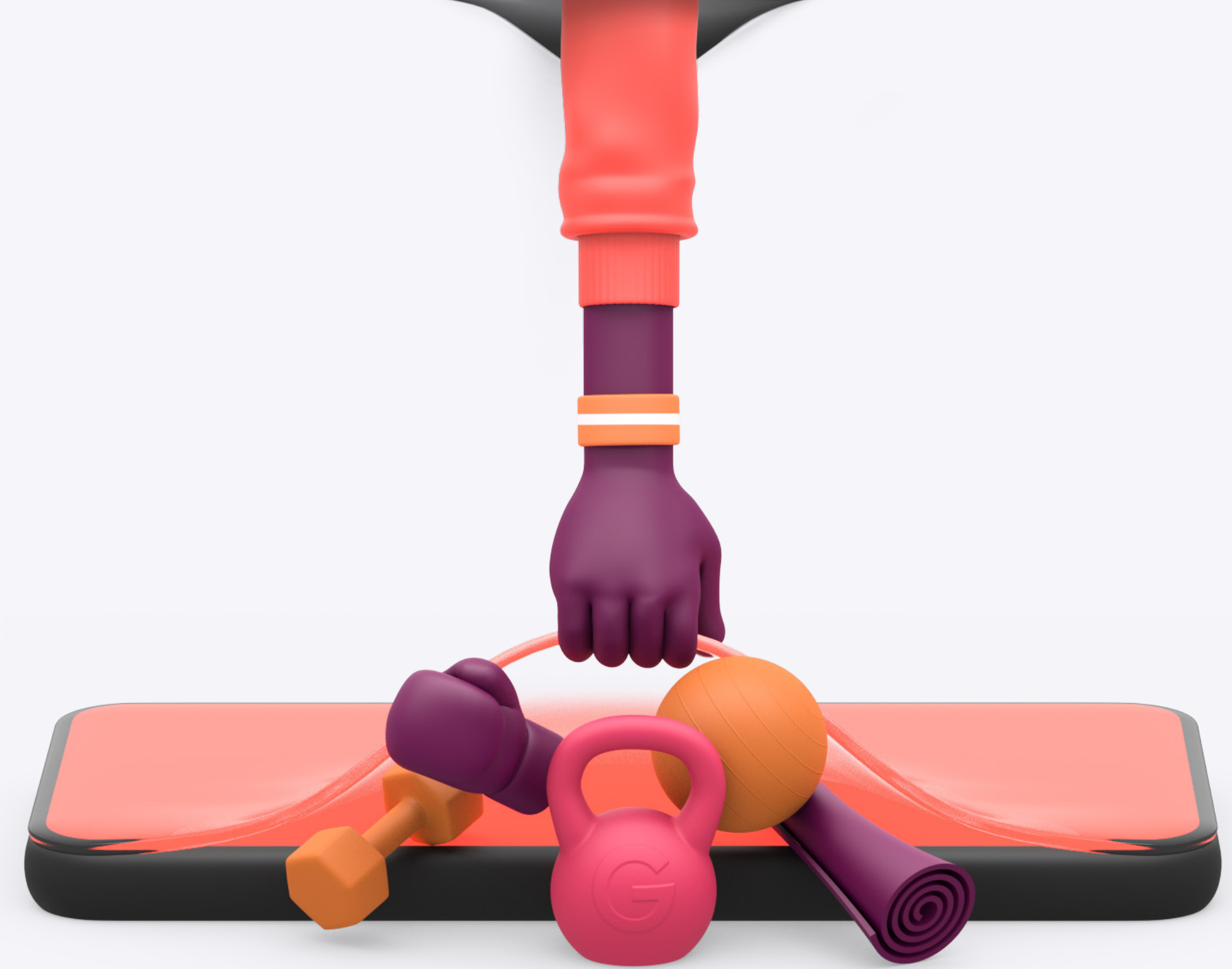




## **Do you have a plan for a surge in demand for elective medical procedures that have been deferred because of the pandemic?**

Elective medical procedures mostly came to a screeching halt in early 2020 as stay-at-home orders took effect. A May 2020 study reported by [McKinsey & Company](#) of the number of orthopedic surgical procedures suggested, for example, that the U.S. might face a backlog of more than 1 million total joint and spine surgery cases by mid-2022 (at the least!) and will need up to 16 months to work through the backlog of orthopedic care. Employers could feel the impact financially (in their share of medical care benefits) and in terms of performance and productivity (in the number of requests for time off as employees continue to schedule these and other non-emergency medical procedures).

**As you continue to move forward with your reopening, it will be critical to plan for the evolution of the new work environment.**



## **How have you accounted for possible capacity and technology issues because of demand changes as more employees return to the workplace?**

As you continue to move forward with your reopening, it will be critical to plan for the evolution of the new work environment. As more people return to the workplace – or as more opt to work remotely – HR leaders need to stay in the loop with their IT and operations departments to avoid disruptions and confusion.



# Summing Up

Companies around the world have begun bringing more workers back to the office. One survey of business leaders found that 70% expect to have employees back in the office in some capacity by this fall. Meanwhile, many workers have adjusted to working from home. But as vaccinations are proving effective, many more employees will now need to learn how to work from the *office* during a global pandemic. At the same time, workers are quitting their jobs at the highest rates in 20 years. Some 4 million people quit their jobs in April 2021 alone.

**“My personal belief is that this is a sea change,” Brian Welle, VP of People Analytics at Google, told CNBC’s series Make It. “There is no going back to the status quo.”**

If you’re in HR or any area of people management today, you’re living through an incredible and unique experience. Now, as you open up and create your organization’s new life, you’ll need to be sure you continue to ask the right questions to get the information you need to best navigate the road ahead – for your employees, your leadership, and your organization.



# Gympass



**Gympass is the most complete corporate wellbeing platform in the world, with a results-driven strategy and inclusive plans that will meet the needs of all your employees.**

Find out how we're on a mission to reinvent wellbeing, making it universal, engaging, and accessible for your team.

[Learn more](#)