4 Step
Return-to-Work Plan

HOW TO BUILD YOUR RETURN TO WORK PLAN

Return to Work doesn't equate Return to Normal.

Most organizations will need to adapt their workplaces and work practices.

If you haven't already started a Return to Work plan – or charged back to work without one – you'll want to follow these four steps from Max Muller, Attorney & Consultant for HRMorning and Principle at Max Muller & Associates:

1. Form a planning team

"Get a handle on the overall effort," Muller said. "Seize control so there are no ad-hoc decisions."

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Pull together a group from across functions and departments in your company. This serves two purposes: You get diverse perspective on what Return to Work should look like, and you're more certain information will make it to each area.

Clarify roles and responsibilities and plan "how we are going to lift each other up through this," Chowdhri said.

Another critical factor: Give the group one voice. Choose a leader who will disseminate the decisions and information that comes from the Return to Work group. It doesn't have to an executive. It should be a trusted leader who has respected authority and all the information.

Finally, you might want to include some outside, expert insight – such as legal, IT security and facility safety.

2. Develop a flexible plan
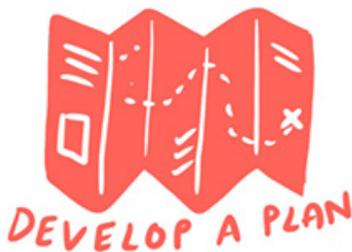
Change will continue, regardless of when any organization returns to the workplace. So the Return to Work plan needs to flexible, especially within the confines of government regulations.

Muller said a Return to Work plan will need to stay in line with – and might need to change for:

● Labor employment implications
● Workplace safety implications, and
● Wage and hour implications.

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According to Muller, every facet is important, but "safety and health trumps all of them." Bottom line, your foremost responsibility is to keep employees safe throughout and beyond the return to work.

He suggested you stay current on your local and state mandates, and offered these government resources:

- www.fda.gov
- www.cdc.gov
- www.dol.gov
- www.osha.gov
- www.eeoc.gov

Another critical factor: "Don't just create a plan," Chowdhri said. "You need to have a plan to communicate the return to work plan. Be transparent and give employees context behind the plan." One more reason assigning a leader with authority is important.

3. Return to work in phases
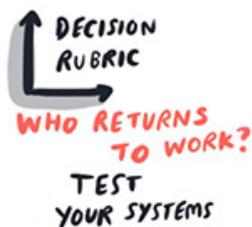
In many cases, not every employee needs to come back to work on-site at the same time. In some cases, some employees may not need to come back all the time. In a few cases, employees may not need to come back on-site at all.

That's why Muller suggested a phased return to work.

First, companies want to consider who needs to come back. A few things to think about:

● What can be done where – on-site or remotely?
● What roles or duties need collaboration?
● What characteristics do employees need to have to work remotely (e.g., a history of good attendance, proven organizational skills, initiative and self-motivation)

Next, work on the physical location preparation – signage, workstation distancing, sanitation, HVAC, PPE supplies, barriers, etc.

Then, work out Return to Work Safety policies that address things such as testing, masking, response to infection, social distancing expectations, etc.

"Ask volunteers to start the Return to Work plan efforts," suggested Muller. "This instills a sense of trust."

4. Plan necessary, ongoing activities

ONGOING MONITORING RESPONSE PLAN & TALENT MANAGEMENT

The success of any Return to Work plan lies in vigilance.

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Make sure expectations, personnel and established guidelines are in place to:

- Stay abreast of government regulations and mandates
- Test, trace, report and isolate infections
- Respond safely and quickly to reported infections
- Continually communicate HR information to employees
- Get feedback from employees, and
- Engage and motivate employees.

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