

THE WHAT'S NEXT HANDBOOK FOR MANAGERS

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic altered the way that so many of us conduct business and live our lives. We've had to learn new ways of working, going to school, and being with friends and family — and doing whatever we can to safeguard the health and wellness of ourselves, our families, neighbors, and friends has been top-of-mind.

Today, throughout the country, businesses are looking forward to what's next. What will work look like? How will we reset our behavior and habits? Can we reboot the economy while maintaining all that we've done to protect ourselves?

Every business — and workforce — must address these questions in its own unique way. But, there are also commonalities. Changes in attitude, policies, and procedures will be necessary in what we're calling the three pillars of the “next normal,” the individual, his or her impact, and the workplace community.





In the coming months, you may be asked to play a number of critical roles. As a manager, you'll need to focus on immediate concerns, like business continuity, crisis response, and safety and compliance. As a leader, you'll draw on your own reserves of resilience, agility, and compassion. And, as a strategist, you'll have to anticipate the future, share that vision, and help your team and organization adapt.

We don't yet know exactly how the coming months will look and feel. But, we can all work together as we redefine it and build a safer, more productive next normal.

BACK TO “BUSINESS AS USUAL?”

As we slowly envision emerging from the global pandemic, many are struggling to imagine what business will look like. Now's the time to think about redesigning workspaces, reviewing and rewriting policies, and reengaging with your workforce. The workplace may never be quite the same, but you can prepare yourself and your team for new ways of working.

Use this handbook to help guide your decision-making as you prepare to reopen your workplace in the post-pandemic world.



THE NEW WORKPLACE

As you bring your workforce back to a central location, there are vital decisions you'll need to make. Offices and facilities are gathering places, and workforce safety and wellness must be at the forefront of planning for employees' return.



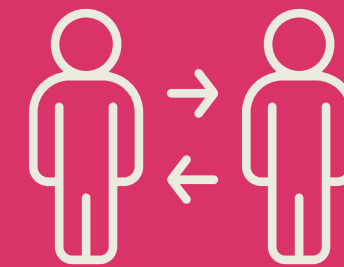
Most manufacturing, shipping, and distribution sites are large, open spaces in which employees need to move freely. On a smaller scale, vast numbers of offices have gone to open floor plans, with workers side by side in cubicles or common working areas.

If you're set up this way, what will you need to adjust? What do you need to be thinking about now to prepare for a returning workforce?

THE NEXT NORMAL MEANS NEW RULES

You'll need to establish new safety procedures. These should be posted for employees, providing them with up-to-date education and training on:

- Any lingering COVID-19 risk factors
- Regular employee temperature checks
- Protective guidance
- Proper behaviors, like cough etiquette and self-care practices



SOCIAL DISTANCING AT WORK

Social distancing is not going away any time soon. Even as people return to centralized workplaces, they're still going to need to keep their distance. How will this look in your office or job site?

GIVE THEM SPACE

Consider whether physical barriers are required to maintain social distance. If barriers are needed, they might include:

- Plexiglass dividers
- Reconfiguration of cubes and shared workspaces
- Rearrangement of common areas

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES:

In addition to following all national and local guidelines, you can consult:



[The Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov/)



[The World Health Organization \(WHO\)](https://www.who.int/)

PROVIDING PROPER, SANITIZED, HYGIENE PRODUCTS

Depending on your unique situation, you should expect to make protective products available and replenish them as needed.

These may include:

- Disposable tissues and hand towels
- No-touch trash cans
- Hand sanitizer
- Facemasks or cloth coverings that align with current CDC recommendations and ADA guidelines
- Other PPE as needed



PANDEMIC RESPONSE POLICIES

No two businesses are exactly alike, of course. But all leaders must begin to make decisions about how to reintegrate their people back into the workplace, regardless of their organization's size and function. These decisions will have a profound impact on employees and should be part of any company's business continuity plan.



DETERMINE WHO WILL RETURN TO WORK, AND WHEN

Be clear about your expectations for employees. Determine who is essential to have in the office, who can continue working remotely, and who, having been previously furloughed or laid off, can be brought back.

DO SOME WORKFORCE PLANNING

Workforce planning at this point involves determining the right person for the right job, any budgetary restraints in place due to current economic conditions, and how your immediate needs can complement long-term staffing.

- Which employees require face-to-face interaction or in-person availability?
- Who is it necessary to have on hand for the company to operate effectively?
- What jobs can continue to be performed remotely?



ADOPT FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS

As restrictions are lifted and health threats become lighter, you may want to consider adopting flexible working and scheduling options. It may make sense to phase in workers slowly, over weeks or even months, keeping the workplace sparsely populated initially and adding more in-office employees a few at a time.

ADDRESS AND CHANGE POLICIES WHERE NECESSARY

Throughout the return of your workforce, people may come back to a very different office than they left. Some coworkers may still be working remotely and some may have been laid off or furloughed during the crisis. In nearly all cases, your team will be returning with different mind-sets and priorities.

BE AWARE THAT WORKING TEAMS AND RELATIONSHIPS WILL LIKELY CHANGE

New gaps may emerge in both task coverage and skillsets. You'll need to be mindful of these and take steps to fill them, prioritizing cross-functional cooperation and training. This may include pairing in-office and at-home workers to complete projects and build skills both need to be effective.

NEW IDEAS FOR IN-OFFICE SHIFTS

- Rotate schedules so workers split time between the office and home
- Let workers choose their hours, with limits on how many are present at a time
- Ensure the right mix of essential personnel is always available



All options will require thorough cleaning of all work and common areas between shifts

RETHINK MEETINGS

You'll want to think about when, where, and how meetings take place. Avoid the temptation to return to the comfort of everybody-in-the-conference room interactions. Besides creating potential health risks, these may marginalize those who are still working remotely and you could miss out on their input, insight, and expertise.

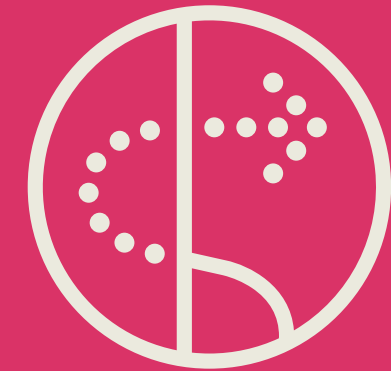
LET THE AGENDA DRIVE ATTENDANCE

Even with employees back at their desks, you'll need to follow health experts' advice regarding how many people can safely sit around conference or meeting room tables. If someone doesn't really need to attend, they shouldn't be there. If meetings do require a full team, it may make sense to continue holding them virtually for the foreseeable future.

CONSIDER THE POTENTIAL OF A RECURRENCE OF COVID-19

We're all in this together. Encourage employees to immediately report any diagnosis — or even symptoms — of the virus. If someone is found to be COVID-19 positive in the workplace, your company can expect to conduct contact tracing; anyone who was in contact with the infected person must be notified and required to mask for five days.

If you need specific information about office design safety, [look here](#).



LEAD “AND SMOOTH” THE WAY

For many employees, coming back to the workplace will be another in a line of new challenges. You can help smooth the transition by establishing policies that recognize this and provide extra support as your people reintegrate.

MANAGE PEOPLE IN THE NEW WORLD

As a manager, you're the first point of contact for returning workers. Now more than ever, your leadership skills will be valuable as you and your employees deal with fluid and evolving work situations. In preparing to have at least some of your team back in the workplace, there are several issues you'll need to consider.



WHO WILL DETERMINE YOUR STAFFING NEEDS?

Work closely with Human Resources to establish clear policies and procedures. For example...

- Will former employees be contacted first?
- Will former staff members come back at their previous pay rates and benefit levels?
- What is the process for hiring or rehiring during the initial post-pandemic period?
- Will you be able to accommodate employees who prefer to continue working remotely?

[Here's sound advice](#) about onboarding and reboarding in the next normal.



HOW WILL YOU MANAGE A MIX OF CO-LOCATED AND REMOTE TEAM MEMBERS?

Your recent remote managing experiences will serve you well now. But for many managers, these hybrid teams will be a new challenge. As business priorities shifted during the pandemic, many workers have had their responsibilities redefined. Some have moved into new positions or new roles. The team that comes back post-pandemic may not be the team it was just a few months ago.

Start by creating a team charter. This document clarifies important guidelines for how the team will operate. Develop it in a group session to encourage everyone's understanding and buy-in.

- Set clear goals, standards, expectations, and rules of engagement
- Ensure open and thorough communication — this is key with hybrid teams
- Whenever possible, talk instead of writing an email
- Establish email standards for when you do have to write
- Define when team members should communicate and expect responses
- Involve everyone in team communications and decisions
- Be open and inclusive, creating a sense of belonging



FACE CHANGES IN OFFICE ETIQUETTE

There's likely to be a shift away from some deeply ingrained cultural norms. People are going to be wary of the familiar handshake, as well as physical displays of friendship, support, and solidarity like hugging, placing hands on shoulders, or back-patting. Depending upon the cultural and business backgrounds of you, your team, and your clients, refraining from these behaviors may take a bit of time, but everyone must accept and respect each other's concerns.

SUPPORT EMPLOYEES COPING WITH STRESS AND SURVIVOR GUILT

Many team members will come back to work, either onsite or remotely, under personal stress. They may have dealt with their own illness and slow recovery, or that of family members. Or they may have watched, from their personal quarantine, the struggles of friends and acquaintances.

Different people experience grief in different ways, but even the most outwardly stoic still feel it. For those who've lost loved ones, and even those who remain on the job when coworkers have been laid off or furloughed, it can bring on "survivor's guilt."

If it seems warranted, direct employees to any mental health resources your company can provide. This may require reaching out to Benefits and Human Resources Departments, but your team members are worth the effort.

To learn more about "survivor's guilt," [read this](#).

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR EMPLOYEES IN DIFFICULT TIMES

- Acknowledge their emotions outright
- If they want to discuss what's happened, give them the opportunity to do so
- Ask for support from HR and Employee Benefits
- Recognize the contribution of the surviving employees
- Help them reengage and refocus their energy by involving survivors in building their new teams

BROUGHT TO YOU BY SKILLSOFT

Reintegrating employees into the pandemic response workplace will be a challenge for everyone. Managers need to reexamine and revise their working styles right alongside their workers. But together, you can create a new workplace that's inclusive and open, and a place of emotional support for both those onsite and those working at home.

What the post-pandemic workspace looks like is yet to be determined, but the decisions you make right now will go a long way to ensuring that it's safe, healthy, and sustainable.



ABOUT SKILLSOFT

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