

Returning to Work: What Do Employees Think?

Find out what are the things you need to consider when developing and revising plans for your employees to return back to the office.

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EINPresswire.com/ -- There has been a lot written about the recently updated guidance from the CDC on how to protect people from the Delta variant of the Covid 19 virus.



How are managers supposed to react?

It's a given that you want to create a safe [working environment](#) to help keep your employees, contractors, suppliers, and customers safe on-the-job.

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And so it's likely that you've been reading about the latest policies being rolled out by famous name corporations, such as United Airlines which recently mandated that all its employees get Covid vaccines. Or perhaps you've been looking at conflicting local and state regulations – such as those issued by Florida and Texas which discourage the implementation of mask and/or vaccine mandates – in an effort to trying to find a way forward for your organization.

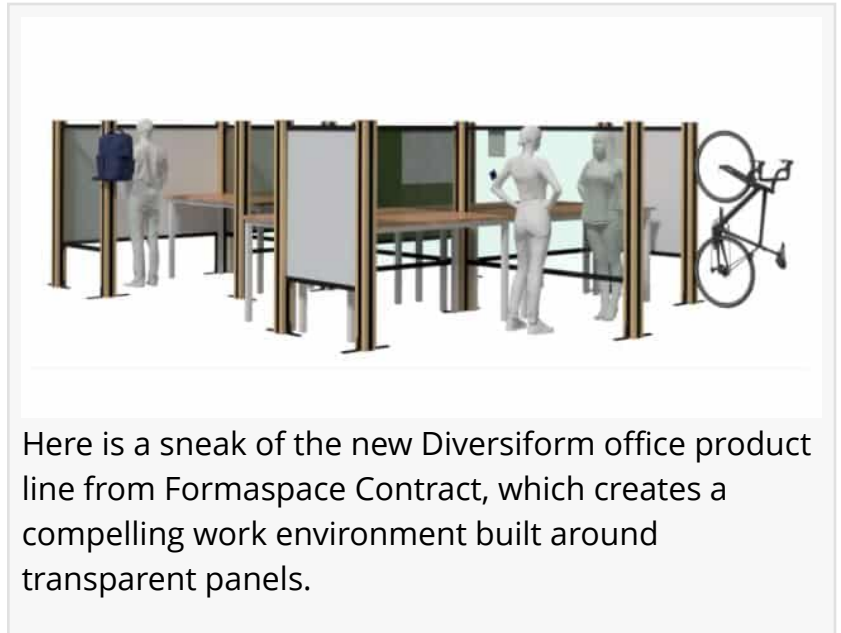
It's not easy to establish an effective response when the circumstances are changing so quickly. And, it goes without saying that there is no one-size-fits-all approach – not every solution works for every business.

What to do?

We suggest focusing on the needs and concerns of your employees.

It's time to find out what are their concerns? What is their understanding of the current pandemic and how it affects them, their children, their families, and their friends?

What policies or programs can you put in place as a manager that can help make your employees feel more secure about either A) working in the office or B) working from home or C) a combination of the two e.g. a hybrid work environment?



Here is a sneak of the new Diversiform office product line from Formaspace Contract, which creates a compelling work environment built around transparent panels.

In the following sections we will look at many of the common concerns that your employees may be facing, whether they are office workers, line managers, or HR or legal compliance officers.

Of course, these may not apply to all your employees, but we trust that you'll find this to be a useful checklist when crafting your own plans for bringing workers back to the office.

And we'll also provide some of the relevant news and data points, such as polling information or policies being implemented by government agencies or other corporations, to provide you additional resources for crafting your own plans.

What Office Workers Are Feeling

Let's start by identifying some of the key concerns that your office employees might have – and what you can do about it.

1. Rising Concern About Covid Cases Among Young School Children And Teachers

As K-12 kids return to school, parents are becoming understandably alarmed about reports that the Delta variant is more transmissible than the earlier Covid "Classic" and that children who are too young to get the vaccine are coming down with cases of the disease.

Understandably, this new situation is creating great anxiety and uncertainty among parents of young children. How can they return to the office if their school district resumes online instruction due to Covid?

Employers need to reach out and reassure these office workers that they will be taken care of if they need to continue working from home where they can supervise their children if online classes resume.

2. Overwhelming Covid Vaccine And Mask Anxiety

Employees are hearing conflicting advice in the media about Covid vaccines and mask policies.

A big majority of adults in the US have already received at least one shot of the Covid vaccine, and polls indicate that an overall majority of Americans approve of policies that mandate wear masks while indoors, such as in the office.

However, as we're all aware, there are many others who are determined to not get the vaccine – nor will they accept a mask mandate under any circumstances. This opinion is reinforced by some state regulations, such those in Florida and Texas, where their respective state governors have issued executive orders restricting the implementation of vaccination requirements or mask mandates.

Before implementing a policy at your workplace, the first step employers should undertake is to find out from each of your workers how they feel about these issues and how you can accommodate them before issuing a top-down mandate.

(We'll talk about some of the vaccine and mask policy options available to HR managers and legal compliance officers in the sections below.)

3. Waiting For FDA Approvals For Covid Vaccines And Booster Shots

The FDA is fast-tracking the long-awaited official regulatory approval of the new Covid vaccines – with reports suggesting they could be forthcoming by Thanksgiving.

This may help alleviate concerns about getting a Covid shot among the vaccine-hesitant population.

However, we're not out of the woods yet as some of the most enthusiastic vaccine proponents are already clamoring for a third vaccine shot in order to boost their immune response the Delta variant.

Employers should be aware of this booster issue, it might become barrier to entry for workers preferring to wait for a third Covid vaccine (booster) shot before returning to the office.

4. Distress Over Returning To The Office

Looking back on it now, it's quite remarkable that during 2020 so many office workers were able to pack up their things and quickly resume business activities while working from home.

Nonetheless the change was quite dramatic and it took quite a bit of effort to get used to

working from home (WFH).

For many, they view this as a permanent change; indeed quite a few people moved from crowded city apartments to homes in rural exurbs where they can enjoy a better quality of life and a lower cost of living. And even those people who did not move have come to appreciate the added flexibility that comes from working from home.

Now in many cases managers are asking their workers to return to the office.

However, you shouldn't underestimate how stressful this request can be for people.

It represents another round of change and disruption in people's lives.

5. Unease About Resuming Regular Office Activities

Many employees may harbor specific objections about returning to the office. As an employer, you should investigate what these concerns are so you can address them.

For example, workers may be concerned about whether you are following CDC guidance in making the environment at the office safe for their return. They may be concerned about sanitizing protocols in common areas, such as restrooms; how they will maintain social distancing on the job; or whether there will be sufficient air circulation and ventilation in their work area.

Eating at work may be another concern; whereas in the past, workers may have gone out to eat in area restaurants, but that may no longer be a viable option. On the other hand, some employees may avoid gathering in the company cafeteria without reassurance about improved safety protocols and sanitizing procedures. (One solution could be offering outdoor seating areas for eating meals.)

One way to tackle this issue head-on is to invest in your office environment by updating it with new layouts – ones that space people further apart – and demonstrate your commitment to employee safety and well-being.

6. Domestic Conflicts When Working From Home: Discord In The Home Office

We have touched on workers' anxiety about returning to the office, but it turns out that working from home can bring about its own set of stressful situations.

For example, there are now reports that families are having disagreements over who should get priority access to the best workplace and/or computer in the home office.

Savvy employers should try to pick up on these domestic conflicts as it might affect worker

productivity – but it might also serve as a reason to encourage workers to return to the office when the time is right.

7. Lockdown Anxiety And Mental Health Issues

Thanks to the Delta variant, widespread stress caused by the Covid pandemic is back, and it's creating another wave of anxiety. As a result, many among us are questioning our well-being and mental health.

Employers need to be sensitive to this issue.

Consider conducting nonjudgmental mental health awareness training and provide explanations of the mental health counseling benefits your employee health plan offers.

Emphasize how your workers can receive confidential mental health counseling if they feel they need it, without having to alert their co-workers or managers.

8. Is It A Golden Age For Introverts?

How do you address the slice of your workforce that prefers conducting business online and through Zoom meetings – and never wants to return to the office?

In this case, we're talking about the quiet "introvert" personality types who may feel that working from home is the way to go.

You may need to seek permanent accommodation for this type of worker because, as we'll discuss in the recruiting and retention section below, they may opt to leave for another employer rather than be obliged to return to the office full time.

9. Address Angst Among Extroverts

On the other hand, many extrovert workers can't wait to return to socializing in the office.

As a result, these types of employees may be quite distressed by the prospect of continuing to work from home.

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