



LET'S GET TO BUSINESS

COVID-19 Considerations and Guidelines for Remote Work and Returning to Work

With so many considerations around COVID-19 and the amount of quick decisions we've had to make, it's no wonder we're feeling a bit stressed these days. If your business was considered Essential, you have been open the entire time during the Pandemic. If not, you may have staggered the number of staff entering and working in the building at one time, closed completely for a period of time, reduced hours, reduced staff, offered a limited availability of products/services, or maybe you're fully-remote now and for the foreseeable future. Some organizations have gone fully remote forever! Imagine that! Unfortunately, we know that some businesses had to close their doors for good as well and we are grateful that they were able to be a part of our Communities for the time they were.

TECHNOLOGY

- Embrace it! It's here to stay. Whether you return to the workplace full-time, part-time, or have gone remote, the way we utilize and leverage technology will never be the same. Be cognizant of potential Zoom Fatigue that can come from being so "on", with close-up facial contact in remote meetings, the number of meetings still occurring, and the fact that video is now showing components of employees' personal space unless they're using backgrounds if the platform you're meeting on allows for it.
- Virtual HR Conferences and other businesses have leveraged components of Artificial Intelligence to facilitate and support components of events and the business. Hopefully, we're all figuring out more effective, efficient ways of doing work through leveraging advancing technology! Expect to hear more chatter about it in the workplace.
- As more and more of us have been remote, TeleHealth has become a larger part of our lives, so expect to create private spaces for this in the workplace. TeleHealth has previously been an under-utilized benefit.
- Recruitment and on-boarding have a new face in light of remote work within the Pandemic, and some organizations have put into place some practical and fun best practices to create successful employee experiences. We support that all day!

SECURITY/COMPLIANCE

- Is your IT protocol up to snuff? As we know, fraud and criminal activity is even more on the rise since we've encountered the Pandemic. Don't let your organization be the next victim. Now is the time (if you haven't already) to beef up your internal security measures.
- Remind employees that while working remotely from home or even as businesses open back up that all regular security protocols are in place. If employees have meetings or work from a



LET'S GET TO BUSINESS

remote business, they should still exercise all of the standard proper security protocols with their equipment:

- Not giving out passwords
- Lock their workstation when not using
- Not leaving equipment in a vehicle or other location where it could be compromised or stolen
- Utilizing the organization's VPN/firewalls and other security measures.
- Make sure you're compliant as an organization with any Legal/Regulatory items.
- Now is a great time to freshen up the house on those outstanding compliance and other back-of-the-house projects (policies, procedures, Handbooks, and Job Descriptions, etc.).

HEALTH & SAFETY

- Will you still practice Social Distancing guidelines, require/encourage masks/require vaccinations for purposes of the health and safety of your employees? Will you only allow a certain number of employees, customers, or vendors onsite at a time? Do you need to make office design modifications to accommodate new ways of work?
- If you're returning to the workplace in one form or another, you should still be following all of the standard Legal, Regulatory, and CDC guidelines to keep employees and visitors safe. This may still mean limited/no non-essential travel, no visitors in the building or outside meetings, asking for a Doctor's note, or employees needing to quarantine.
- You may need to rethink those in-person meetings, adding more virtual options and/or limiting the number of people attending in-person. It may even be time to rethink that esteemed Open Office Concept.
- And of course, all of the sanitary measures. You likely already still have more touchless items (soap dispensers, towel holders, garbage cans, and increase cleaning and sanitizing of more and more surfaces).
- Don't make assumptions! Some employees are dealing with disabilities and/or other health concerns that they may or may not have disclosed. Just because someone is coughing or says they have breathing issues, don't assume they have COVID or other conditions. It's ok to ask questions and to ask if symptoms are COVID-related and if anyone in the household has been exposed.

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

- Assume that your employees are performing to work standards remotely as they would in the workplace and come from a place of trust. If you were managing through a performance concern pre-COVID that is yet unresolved, continue managing that just as you would. The employee and the organization deserve for that to continue to be managed.



LET'S GET TO BUSINESS

- Use any extra time you have on hand to skill up, take a course, develop, or to get on a project or a cross-collaboration that could lead to your next opportunity. Innovation and Growth Mindset is where it's at! Now is a good time to take a look at those back-burner projects, or that networking/mentoring, that you've been meaning to get to as well. They could lead to your next promotion!
- Recognize that mitigation of risk measures still apply in the remote environment. If your employee had ADA Reasonable Accommodations, as an employer, you're still obligated to adhere to those. The Interactive Process is in place for a reason, so it doesn't mean you can't explore whether that's still feasible or whether another accommodation may be better. However, you must still abide by the law and you should also come from a place of empathy for your employees' needs.
- Return to work procedures must be consistent for all employees to avoid a situation of risk/disparate impact. You can still practice case by case judgment as applicable since not every circumstance is identical. Confidentiality should always be top priority as well. Keep information safe and confidential, and only share with those with a need to know.
- Do not create an environment of exclusion. This has happened from a place of fear. Do legally and respectfully explore any concerns further to keep everyone safe. Making the right decision for health and safety purposes won't land you in trouble legally for the most part, but making assumptions for the wrong reasons could. All of the normal Legal/Regulatory players are still active during these still-uncertain times.
- Recognize and respect that there is still very real fear and concern around this serious Pandemic and give a safe space for employees to share concerns. You don't have to and shouldn't allow it to be disruptive if it's not rooted in fact, but you also don't want to minimize its impact to people or their perceptions on returning to the workplace. You may need to host more meetings or touch-bases to address these concerns so they don't go unchecked, run rampant, and lead to the infamous rumor mill. Also leverage (and remind employees of) Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), which are also very under-utilized benefits.

MENTAL HEALTH/PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

- Open communication eases anxiety and can settle down the rumor mill.
- Transparency is key and leaders shouldn't feel like they have to know it all. Tell your employees what you know and be confident enough to tell them when you don't know. Honesty is always the best policy. Share your commitment to the employee experience. Your employees will thank you for it and will remember it even after the difficult times lift.
- Be open-minded and nimble because it is more important now than ever. Don't micromanage remote workers or bog them down in inefficiencies and ineffective work processes, projects, or requests because you don't trust them.

- Don't check out. Check on your team without an agenda. Check in for the sake of checking in to let your team know you care, and that you're visible and accessible. They need you right now.
- Don't be rigid with work hours or expect employees to be glued to their systems.
- Let employees work when it's most productive for them. Guess what: You get inherent benefit in that too! Encourage your team to get up and move throughout the day and to take breaks and get outside during the day. It's so much easier in this environment to work a full day and then some without realizing it when home is also work for many of us. Even when you return to work, organizing Walking Groups, health-related events, and opportunities to stretch, talk, and get moving during the day!
- Let vacation be vacation! Resist the urge to send through those requests or to reach out to employees on vacation. Burnout is still a thing and it's just never cool to work on vacation or to expect that others do so. EVER! Vacation is an earned benefit for a reason. At CEPHR, we approach vacation as the earned benefit that it is, and we want everyone to enjoy the deserved time off. Gone are the days where we recall getting calls from former employers while out of the country for something trivial with a loose, disingenuous promise of "making you whole for any time you spend to help us out."
- Support each other and assume positive intent. In general, people are not looking to do a bad job or the wrong thing. Come from a place of empathy to reach common goals and understanding.
- Recognize that some employees are living with their abusers and have essentially been trapped living at home with them during the Pandemic. They may need some additional support, so also recognize that they may not always disclose this to their employer until things get really bad. CEPHR has supported employees through this both current and previous state. Your employees may not even be telling family/friends, so another reminder to check in. There are a lot of other things that have transpired during the Pandemic where employees need extra TLC. You may be their only ally. Don't take that for granted! Being an employer and a leader come with great responsibility.
- Final shameless plug for EAP: If you haven't realized or referred your employees to it already, do so. EAP is a great confidential resource!
- Leaders, don't forget to take care of yourselves as you're taking care of employees. I've had many conversations over the years where I remind leadership about this. Self Care is important to all of us. It's so easy to give, give, give to the team and to the organization, but as leaders, we have to fill our cup too to be at our best and to engage our team.