



**THE MANAGER'S SIMPLE
GUIDE TO **HELPING**
PEOPLE RETURN TO THE
WORKPLACE.**

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Organisations took immediate and decisive action in moving people to safety by working from home or furloughing them. This built increased trust for many between the organisation and their people. Commitment grew and in many cases performance and productivity with it; certainly not to be sneezed at.

In direct contrast, the return to the office could erode all this great work if handled too casually. Organisations have done a great job at informing how they are practically keeping people safe and how they want people to be in the office. But keeping people safe is more than the practicalities. It is about their wellbeing too and, if handled poorly, it won't mean simply an acceptable return to the previous standards, it could signal a dramatic downturn in productivity that could cost organisations dearly.

This simple guide is to help managers promote a confident return to the workplace. And, if you have already started that transition, then these ideas will help you generate greater commitment for individual performance and contribution.

KEEPING PEOPLE PRACTICALLY SAFE IS VITAL BUT IT IS PEOPLE'S WELLBEING AND ATTITUDE TO RISK THAT POSES A THREAT TO THE ORGANISATION'S PERFORMANCE AS YOU RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE.



PEOPLE'S RESPONSES

There are four main types of response from people:

1. THOSE WHO ARE GENUINELY CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR SAFETY AND WELLBEING

2. THOSE WHO HAVE FOUND WORKING FROM HOME A REVELATION - THEY HAVE ENJOYED IT AND HAVE BEEN MORE PRODUCTIVE

3. THOSE WHO HAVE ENJOYED THE FREEDOM OF WORKING FROM HOME AND FRANKLY HAVE BEEN SWINGING THE LEAD.

4. THOSE WHO HAVE STRUGGLED WITH WORKING FROM HOME AND CAN'T WAIT TO GET BACK

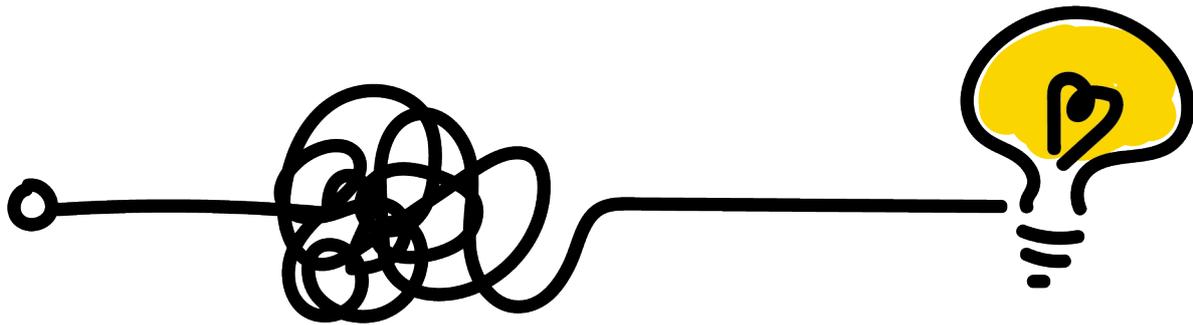
If your organisation has a one size fits all return policy, you will fail to minimise the risks at such a crucial time. It is essential you manage these responses successfully.

It's made significantly more complex by the fact that social distancing is still in play. Think about it; hot desking is a tough ask for people who like to adorn their desks with personal items. It's OK if you are a road warrior who heaves your laptop around on your back but what about those people who have their chair at a particular angle or their screens at a specific height to help them be more effective? Then you've also got your huggers, your personal space invaders, your over-sharers, your tactile touchers – all of whom will elicit a response from people who are more concerned about protecting themselves.

ARE YOUR MANAGERS READY TO DEAL WITH THIS?

IDEAS TO HELP MANAGERS

1. Start with the end in mind

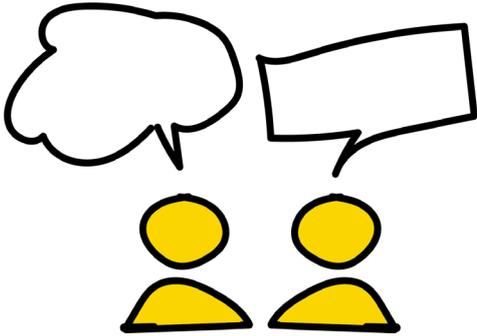


As a manager, you want performance. Your people want to be understood. Simply providing safety procedures will not get you the result you need. Starting with the end in mind is all about your focus. You need to be clear in your mind about the outcome that you seek. You want people to perform a great job and be efficient about the way they go about it AND you want them to feel confident in their return. The two go hand in hand.

If you prioritise one of these outcomes ahead of the other, you will not get the result you need. They are both equally important. People feeling safe and confident leads to the performance outcome for the organisation. So it stands to reason that you will put time and effort in helping people feel safe, rather than relying on the organisation's information to do that for you.

**FOCUSING YOUR TIME AND ENERGY ON HELPING FEEL
CONFIDENT AND SAFE LEADS TO HIGHER LEVEL OF
PERFORMANCE**

2. Have a conversation



Having a conversation is crucial if you really want people to feel confident about their return. If you don't actively facilitate this exploration then they will do it for themselves and you won't hear about it. Or even worse, you will run the risk of a litany of complaints.

Some organisations choose to use surveys like survey monkey or you might have your own internal pulse surveys - all of which are a useful conduit to better understanding how people are feeling. It's what you do with this that is important. In times like this, human to human contact will serve you well. You are also likely to uncover useful information that might not otherwise have come to light.

PEOPLE REALLY DON'T EXPECT YOU TO HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS FOR THEM BUT THEY NEED TO KNOW YOU ARE ON THEIR SIDE AND THAT YOU UNDERSTAND.

5

Some tips:

- Be clear on the **purpose** of the conversation at the opening "I wanted to have a chat with you about our return to the office/workplace"
- **Lead into a safe question** "Have you been able to watch/read the information that has been sent out about our return?"
- Then **explore opinions** "What do you think of the proposals?"
- Now you have them chatting you can start to move onto their feelings "how has working from home really been for you? How do you feel about returning?"
- Then you can move onto some more **challenging questions** as you are moving into a safer space "What challenges do you see for yourself in the return?" This might lead onto uncovering some things you might not have thought about e.g. challenges around family life.
- **Show empathy** and build on their thoughts during the conversation rather than just question and answer e.g. "I can see that might be tough for you/ I didn't know you had all that to deal with etc."
- **Be honest** and share some of your concerns too - this helps to build your relationship and their trust in you as a manager.
- At the end of the conversation, **summarise** what you heard and agree sensible action that you can take. Summarise some of the key points from an organisational perspective about keeping safe.
- End the conversation with some **positives** about how you think/feel the team will benefit from the return and maybe explore some of the exciting things you hope to implement in the future.

3.

Be collaborative

Get the team together virtually. I'm sure you all have team sessions already which is brilliant. But make one of these especially about exploring the return to the workplace. Once you have had individual conversations pull the team together and feedback to them the joint thoughts and feelings of the team.

FOLLOW THIS SIMPLE STRUCTURE

1. **Set the context** of this conversation clearly beforehand e.g. "To explore how we, as a team, can support each other to be safe and confident in our return."
2. **Feedback** on the comments you have had from members (anonymously) and explain that there is an understandable difference in how ready people feel about returning. Tell them that the aim of this call is to agree actions to support each other so we are strong together.
3. **Pose the challenges** that you have heard from the team and ask if there any others. See if there is any common grouping between the challenges e.g. there may be some around keeping a distance. If this is the case then cluster these all together
4. **Prioritise** with the group the challenges in terms of risk - which ones have the greatest risk to our performance/ wellbeing? (whatever you think will mean most to your team) You can have these on a whiteboard or slide and ask them to dot vote on the challenges quickly and then discuss. To dot vote, tell each person how many votes they have and ask them to distribute them amongst the challenges - if you give 3 votes, for example, they can use all 3 on one if they think it is really important or they can distribute their 3 votes amongst 3 different challenges.
5. **Discuss** the voting and explore why they think these are the most important issues.
6. Then comes **idea generation**. Depending on the size of your team or the number of challenges you want to tackle, you might like to break them up into solution groups to explore a particular cluster then feedback to the main group for agreement.
7. **Agreement** - as a team agree the actions you want to commit to and agree the issues that need further thought.
8. **End on a positive.**

4. Deal with performance

Let's be honest about this. Not everyone has had the organisation in mind during lockdown and some would have really enjoyed being without the scrutiny of the workplace. Hopefully you have been able to keep on top of any performance issues already but if you haven't, you can't afford to shirk it.

You will need everyone to be pulling out all the stops with any return to the workplace. Some organisation's are struggling and unless everyone shows up and is committed to action then frankly they won't have a job anyway.

Having people working from home, has, for some managers, been a significant cause of stress. There has been less opportunity to be 'on it' and they have had to trust their team. Yet for others, this freedom has been a revelation and one they have enjoyed. They have seen their team's performance accelerate in line with this freedom. So, as part of the return it is important to really consider how you can best support your team to excel. Start conversations around new goals and outcomes your organisation needs.

ASK QUESTIONS LIKE:

- What was your key success last week?
- What are you most proud of from last week?
- What challenges did you face last week? (and how did you overcome them?)
- What did you learn last week?
- What do you aim to achieve/ learn this week?
- What support do you need from me?

The more you challenge your team along these lines the more they are focused on the value they offer rather than the pieces of paper they push around or numbers of emails they answer. You are setting high expectations that the majority of the team will rise to. If they don't they will be easily spotted and you can address any gaps more easily.



5. Honour others

For some people lockdown has been hugely stressful. They might have been the quiet heroes keeping the company going, they might have volunteered to help others in need, they might have suffered loss themselves during this period. And what about those within the organisation that may have lost their jobs during lockdown?

WE ARE WHOLE PEOPLE WHEN WE COME TO WORK AND HONOURING THE EXPERIENCES IS A SENSITIVE WAY TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING.

It is important to talk about all of these experiences and help people know that it is OK for them to feel the loss and where possible encourage them to keep in touch with former colleagues.

Encourage people to share their stories, create a social platform or ecosystem where people can keep in touch and reduce the sense of isolation.



6. Role Model

You are your team's biggest role model. Positive role models influence other's actions, motivate them to uncover their potential and overcome challenges. Being a role model informally pushes people to be the best they can be. Make sure you represent the best of yourself at all times. Being a role model sets the tone for your team.

Some things to think about:

FOCUS Demonstrate hard work towards goals and the organisation's success. Be persistent and pitch in where you need to help overcome challenges and get momentum behind actions. Show you don't mind what the job is, you will get it done. This helps eradicate the 'entitlement' mentality that some people show at work.

TRUST Trust is earned. Show your team that you can be trusted by always being fair, honest, and consistent. Don't engage in gossip, and don't tolerate it within your staff. Your team need to know you have their backs, and you should take every opportunity you can to prove it. This is an ideal time to demonstrate that you've got this and if you do it will pay dividends in the long run.

ACCOUNTABILITY Role models take responsibility for their actions and inspire others to do the same. If you make a mistake, admit it and let the team know how you plan to correct the situation. Never blame others or make excuses.

RESPECT Recognise individual and team achievements. Celebrate success. Respect is paramount in every situation, and is especially important during situations when you have to correct behaviour.

POSITIVE MINDSET Business is unpredictable. As a manager, you need to be prepared to deal with high stress situations. Your team will be watching closely as you handle challenges. If you overreact or get easily overwhelmed, your staff will be inclined to do the same. Model the positive behaviour you expect from your staff.

LIVE THE VALUES Help people reconnect with the culture and values through your actions. Make sure all your actions align to the values and encourage your team to do the same. This will help alleviate any feelings of dislocation that people might have and help them reconnect to the purpose of the organisation.

The pandemic has challenged organisations large and small in their methods of communication and resilience. It has shown the importance of agility and it is up to everyone to play their part and respond to secure a brighter future.

This simple 6 step formula for dealing with recovery is designed to help you and your team feel more in control and positive about the future. No-one knows what is round the corner but if you build these steps into your recovery plan you will be better equipped, together, to deal with that uncertainty and your reputation as a can - do team will hold you all in good stead for any future disruption.

GOOD LUCK!

10



GENIUS LEARNING PROVIDES LEARNING THAT IMPROVES RELATIONSHIPS AND REDUCES COMPLEXITIES SO YOUR PEOPLE GET MORE DONE AND RESULTS SKYROCKET. FIND OUT MORE AT WWW.INSPIREYOURGENIUS.COM