Tips for Managers on Returning to Work After a Pandemic

Many people are looking forward to returning to work, their offices and "normal" life once social distancing practices and stay-at-home orders are lifted, but what exactly will that look like? Even after businesses and public places start to open back up, the CDC will be providing guidance to prevent another wave of COVID-19. As a result, your work life might not look exactly like it did before the pandemic. Keep the following things in mind as you and your colleagues start to transition back:

- **Stay up to date** on what the CDC and your local governments are recommending. You may be able to return to business, but still be asked to continue practices such as wearing masks, sanitizing often and avoiding close contact with others. Consider if you will be providing supplies or expecting your employees to do so.

- **Consider the circumstances that each employee may be dealing with**. It's possible that returning to the workplace may not be as easy for some, particularly if they still don't have child care, are either considered high risk or care for someone who is high risk for the virus, etc. Remain as flexible as your organization allows to accommodate for these unique situations.

- **Check in on your employees on a regular basis**. Times of crises are an opportunity for teams to become closer and for management to show they care. Keep in mind people are concerned about maintaining their employment, so reassurance from you can go a long way. Even if you are furloughing employees, it's best to let them know where they stand.

- **Arrange for your office or workspace to be sanitized.** The sooner the better - waiting may cause significant delays, considering many companies will also be requesting cleaning services. Let employees know what steps have been done to sanitize the workplace and what your plans are going forward to maintain a safe and hygienic environment, including any CDC guidelines you are following.

- **Plan time reconnect with your employees**. You can arrange times for your team to meet virtually before the return and safely in-person afterwards. Consider having everyone talk about what they gained or what the best part of social distancing was for them. Focus on the positives and resiliency. Do not negate the negative aspects, but try to focus on optimism.

- **Remain supportive with your employees**. Social isolation will affect everyone a little differently. Some may become very depressed or anxious, others may be fearful of being touched or close to others physically. Some will want to talk, and others will not.

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There may have been an increase in things such as domestic abuse, child abuse and substance use during this time period. Remind employees to use the EAP for resources, support and counseling if needed.

- **Immediately address any negative comments** or jokes about someone who was diagnosed with or suspected of having COVID-19. People can feel bullied, harassed and blamed for what happened in the workplace. Make it clear that all precautions per CDC recommendations have been taken. It may be helpful to review the company policy on harassment.

- **Recognize any losses or celebrations** that would normally have been acknowledged if not for social distancing. Consider options, including virtual meetings, to help your employees cope and/or celebrate. Ask employees for their ideas and don't be afraid to get creative.

- **Remember that the EAP Management Consultation and Support team (MCS)** is available for consultation should you have concerns or want to discuss how to best support your team.