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# GETTING BACK TO THE OFFICE

5 ways employers can prepare  
employees for a smooth return to  
the workplace



# There is no denying that the current public health crisis has fundamentally altered the way employers like you have had to approach workplace productivity.

You've likely had to implement work-from-home strategies with little notice and snuff out technical difficulties quickly so your organization can continue collaborating remotely.

You've supported employees with new challenges, like balancing working with children who are now at home all the time and navigating added stress and anxiety due to ever-changing guidelines around COVID-19. And hardest of all, you've had to make some of the most difficult decisions of your career—decisions that don't have any “easy” or “straightforward” answers—all while balancing taking care of your loved ones and yourself.

As hospital statistics begin to look more hopeful and states begin lifting restrictions, a lot of the workforce will likely return to the office. But it's going to look different.

We're here to help you navigate that “different.” To do that, we've created a list of the top five things that you can do as an employer to help your employees (and you) return to work with confidence.

**We see you, and we're proud of you.**

We know it hasn't been easy. But we also know you're doing the most you possibly can for your employees because as an HR professional, that's the kind of person you are.





# 1

## Communicate even more

We know you communicate regularly with your employees. That's one of the qualities that makes you so great at what you do! And during this time of transition, it's more important than ever you communicate clearly, consistently, and transparently with your employees.

### What to do now

- **Send out a survey.**  
Ask your employees what their biggest concerns about returning to the office are, along with what they need to feel safe, reassured, and supported in coming back to work. Set aside time to review every survey reply and see if there are things you can do to address all employee concerns and needs.

### Other things we recommend doing

- **Send emails or have video calls to address any layoffs, furloughs, and compensation impacts.**  
Being transparent with your employees will help you keep their trust and authentically rebuild company culture.
- **Send emails or have video calls to acknowledge wins, no matter how big or small.**  
Focusing on the good in the bad will help reassure your employees that your organization will weather this storm.





# 2

## Prepare The Office

Even if you aren't returning to work for weeks or months, it's best to get a jump on ordering necessary resources and coordinating the installation of things that'll help you keep the office clean and in compliance with social distancing guidelines.

### What to do now

- **Research your options and place orders.** There are lots of resources, like touch-free hand sanitizer and soap dispensers, posters, floor placards, plexiglass workstation shields, contactless ID recognition devices, etc. you can purchase and install before employees return to work. Find an office layout document (preferably with marked measurements), make notes of where you need to place resources to make your space as safe and sanitary as possible, then start ordering them.

### Other things we recommend doing

- **Move furniture around, if needed.** When employees do come back to the office, it's also a good idea to make sure workstations and furniture are at least six feet apart or have plexiglass shields in between them, if possible.
- **Create a deep cleaning schedule for your entire office space.** You'll need to clean every nook and cranny (restrooms, workstations, common areas, air vents, etc.). Having a schedule on what gets done when and by who will help reassure employees they're working in a safe environment.

# 3

## Create social distancing measures

Social distancing is likely here to stay for at least a bit longer. To follow [CDC guidelines](#), it's important to make sure your office has a plan in place to limit the number of people in the office and its different areas at any one time.

### What to do now

- **Come up with an in-office social distancing plan.**  
It's likely that when many offices begin opening, they'll have employees come back in phases or work on-site in shifts. It's a good idea to have employees that have to be on-site to do their jobs come back first, followed by support staff. If that's a larger number of people than is safe to bring back so soon, you can check and see if any employees would prefer to be a part of later waves so they can continue to care for loved ones at home.

### Other things we recommend doing

- **Create a movement flow chart.**  
Use a copy of your office layout to outline potential flows of movement within the office and ensure no one area will get clogged with people. Then, coordinating the placement of signage, line ropes, and floor placards to direct the flow of in-office traffic.
- **Make a plan for the break rooms and other common areas.**  
Have a strict limit on how many people can occupy the kitchen or breakroom at one time. And decide if there need to be any changes to how many people can keep their lunch in the breakroom fridge and freezer.

**Here's an idea:** Have people sign up for lunch and break shifts or consider being more flexible with lunch hours to give those that live closer to the office the option of eating at home.

- **Create a plan for the restrooms.**  
Consider only allowing a certain number of people at a time in restrooms and/or closing off every other urinal and sink, so people are farther apart. You can also install floor placards to ensure people are standing at least 6 feet apart while waiting to use the restroom or wash their hands.





## 4

## Train your workforce

With everything in a constant state of flux, office protocols and health check requirements will likely change regularly. It's best to let your workforce know what to expect before they get back to the office and keep them updated as things evolve.

### What to do now

- **Host a live training for returning employees.**  
In the training, include explanations of all the new social distancing protocols, office changes, and any health check requirements (more on that one below) for those working at the office. At the end of it, give employees a chance to ask questions.

**Pro tip:** It's also best to send written explanations of these new protocols, changes, and checks so employees can access them later.

### Other things we recommend doing

- **Create a health-check plan for employees who will work in the office.**  
Decide things like if you'll check temperatures upon entry or require employees to self-report, if employees will be required to be cleared to work by their health care provider, and if masks will be required in the office's communal areas or just each employee's personal workspace.
- **Send emails or have video calls to share updates on office return policies and preparation as things evolve.**  
As COVID-19 measures and guidelines evolve, and you make changes to protocols and requirements, send updates to your employees. Also, every time you send out an email or have a video call, it can help your employees to let them know you're there to answer any questions they have.

# 5

## Develop an information hub

Depending on the size and structure of your company, others may need to review and/or access the new protocols, policies, changes, requirements, etc. you make.

### What to do now

- **Store new documents and communications in one place.**  
Document each of the policies, protocols, and requirements you create and store it somewhere safe. Include things like policies and protocols, “what if” scenarios, flowcharts and maps, and copies of employee communication you provide. That way, you or anyone else can access any of these documents quickly.

### Other things we recommend doing

- **Consider creating two hubs.**  
To help save time and avoid confusion, it’s best to keep documents c-level staff needs to have access to in one spot, and documents employees need access to in another. Password protect the c-level hub or only give certain users access to it on your shared servers.
- **Add a “hub” update date if you can.**  
If you’re hosting your hub on an intranet, adding a “last updated” date helps others know if your hub materials include any recent changes or updates. You can even add “Updated” to the name of any resources updated within the last week.

If you’re not hosting your hub on an intranet, you can simply include the “last updated” date at the top of individual documents.





## Putting your workplace reentry plan into action

Preparing the office and your employees for coming back to the office is a challenging task. There's no denying that. But challenging doesn't mean impossible. You've done hard things before, and you can do this, too.

We know it.

Start with a survey, and then work your way through the list from there.

And if you have any questions, please reach out to us at [learnmore@naturallyslim.com](mailto:learnmore@naturallyslim.com).

We're here to help you through this trying time however we can.