



# Crisis: Eight Key Strategies to Support & Prepare Employees Return to Work

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A Global crisis inevitably confronts leaders and businesses with major challenges in protecting the physical and mental welfare of employees. This is along with having to deal with the severe impact on business operation and productivity. Through crisis we not only witness the adverse impact on our physical, social, financial and professional status and wellbeing, we also see how hugely detrimental this can be to our mental health. Many people and businesses must then learn how to adapt in discovering and implementing new, effective and creative ways for both supporting and keeping things going

## Returning to Work

Following large-scale disruption, due to a traumatic incident / crisis, employees and businesses are faced with a major challenge: How can they prepare for and

support a safe and effective return to work? Sustainable strategies, to address this issue, requires recognition of a number of factors. Understanding and responding adequately to stakeholder expectations, safety requirements for physical and mental health, as well as addressing the psychological impact of this crisis are crucial in supporting employees to re-enter and to confidentially engage in their work

A significant starting point is the acceptance that a return to work, for many people, will not be business, as usual and that working practices will need to change. It is also important to be aware that Individuals react very differently to challenging events, so it can be useful for leaders and managers to be prepared for a range of different responses

## How to Prepare for and Support Employees Returning to Work: Eight Key Strategies

## 1. **Acknowledge Employee Needs & the Impact of the Crisis:**

Leaders and Managers can greatly benefit from an awareness and understanding of the psychological and emotional consequences of the present crisis. Clear acknowledgment of the situation, its impact and the continuing risks expresses both the recognised responsibility and enlists joint co-operation

## 2. **Check-In & Offer Emotional Support:**

It is important to take time to check in on employees and find out how they are doing. Empathy is a central part of how to express a genuine understanding and interest in the experience and welfare of others. Listening and acknowledging how the situation could be impacting people and offering appropriate support services, helps decrease fear and promotes a sense of security

### **3. Ensure You Have Open & Continuous Communication:**

One of the most helpful and essential processes, particularly, when dealing with crisis situations, is providing employees with relevant information on their work, as well as the business status, ensuring to keep people regularly updated. In seeking to reassure and reduce anxiety and uncertainty employers can support by providing a clear explanation of work changes and expectations, along with details on how the situation is being managed

In responding to the risks associated to a crisis, it is particularly important to clearly communicate any health and safety measures, which have been put in place to protect the welfare of all employees. People need to have confidence that someone is taking responsibility and that action is being taken to address the situation in the best way possible

### **4. Understand Expectations & Remain Flexible:**

Whatever the expectation there is a need to listen, acknowledge and wherever possible try to accommodate reasonable expectations.

Respectfully expressing what clearly can be done rather than what cannot be done for unmeetable expectations. Being flexible and making reasonable work adjustments are vital to being supportive, as well as gaining optimal engagement and productivity. Businesses should consider the possibility of flexible conditions related to; work hours, working from home, employee roles and tasks, time off, adaptation of working practices and provision of any necessary resources

## **5. Review & Establish Your Business Processes:**

Businesses should ensure that comprehensive and up to date policies and procedures are established, which specify clearly defined regulations and resolution strategies. Enabling businesses to perform at optimal level involves having people and operating systems, which possess adaptable and flexible reactions with a problem-solving approach. Employees are then fully informed and can function within an effective structure with clear guidance

## 6. Match Present Demands & Needs with Appropriate Responses

Businesses and employees greatly benefit from being supported and cared for through the guidance and resources they are given. Following any crisis, businesses should be committed to getting things back on track, as safely and quickly as possible. Identifying the present demands and needs of employees and responding in a direct and practical manner actively supports this process. This also contributes to building a strong and positive company culture, in which employees are more able to trust and feel safe

## 7. Navigate a New Course:

If businesses are to maintain direction and respond successfully to the needs of employees and the demands of the situation, then an openness to different ways of doing things is an absolute necessity. Progress can be held back by insisting on sticking to a particular course and not adapting working practices. Recognising when something is no longer necessary or fit for purpose and altering direction, serves to constructively optimise an

employees' return to work. Leaders and managers can develop and implement changes through lessons learnt, good practice, continuous feedback and a clear complaints and corrective measures process

## 8. **Connect & Utilise External Professional Services:**

Following crisis people can often feel fearful or apprehensive about returning to work. Businesses can then benefit from investing in support services, as well as collaborating and building new partnerships. Working together with relevant professionals and organisations can aid innovation, a greater sense of safety, better engagement, increased productivity, as well as the creation of strong and effective support structures. Most importantly this can promote the positive health and wellbeing of leadership and employees



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