COVID-19: Next Steps for the Workplace
Organizational Questions for Returning to the Office

As States debate when to lift lockdown rules, organizations are left wondering how to safely open their offices and go back to work. In this array of unprecedented challenges, begin by accepting your organization is not going back to the old "*normal*." When thinking about the steps your organizations should take, remember there is no "one size fits all" approach. Here are some important questions to consider so that your team, and your workplace, is ready:

EMPLOYEE ATTENDANCE:

- **Number of Employees on Site:** Will you restrict the number of employees on site? Stagger shifts? Will you continue to promote working from home/tele-working?

- **Accommodations:** What if your office is open but daycares, camps and schools remain closed? Will you make special accommodations for members of vulnerable populations?

- **Entry Screening:** How will you screen employees for entry into the workplace (questionnaire, temperature check on entry, etc.)?

- **Prepare for Absenteeism:** How will your organization operate if COVID-19 related absenteeism spikes? What are your essential operations and functions and have you done enough cross-training to ensure these functions will continue?

- **Company Policies:** Are your company's attendance and PTO policies flexible enough to accommodate the different possible needs of employees?

OFFICE WORKSPACE AND COMMON AREAS:

- **Common Areas:** Which common areas may need to be shut down because it's hard to monitor for social distancing? Which commonly-used items (door handles, copiers, faxes) will require multiple sanitized cleanings throughout the day? Who will do that?

- **Social Distancing Workspace:** Can you swap seating or restructure your floorplan/desk or cubicle layout to promote social distancing? Can you put up sneeze guard panels or social distancing decals on the floors of shared spaces?

- **Mail & Packages:** How will you handle incoming deliveries? Will you require curbside delivery/pickup?

- **Sanitizing Supplies:** Plan to place disinfectant hand gel and antibacterial wipes throughout the office, including by copiers, scanners and all places people share. Provide no-contact trash receptacles for waste. Install high-efficiency air filters and/or increase ventilation rates if possible.

EMPLOYEE BEHAVIORS:

- **Promote Healthy Hygiene Practices:** Plan on posting social distancing and healthy hygiene practices reminders throughout the workplace. Be sure to comply with any State/local posting requirements.

- **Private Offices:** Employees with their own offices should be encouraged to stay in their offices as much as possible.

- **Video conferencing:** Encourage video conferencing over face-to-face meetings. How will your organization create and share videoconference guidelines? Do you have the right equipment? Is training needed?

- **PPE:** Is personal protective equipment required/recommended for specific job duties? Are you generally encouraging masks or face coverings for your employees? If so, are you supplying them?

- **Teleworking Expectations:** If your organization is promoting teleworking, how will you communicate expectations (responsiveness, hours, job responsibilities, etc.)? Do managers need additional training to manage at-home teams?

- **Healthy Habit Guide:** Create and distribute guidelines explaining expected employee in-office hygiene such as: frequent handwashing, covering coughs/sneezes, staying home if they or a family member is ill or have traveled to a COVID-19 hotspot, reminding employees to regularly clean their workstation (phones, keyboards) and to not use each other's equipment, etc.

- **Business Travel protocols:** Will your organization allow business travel and what are the parameters or restrictions? Monitor federal, State and local guidelines for travel?

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE:

- **Organizational Culture:** How is your organization supporting its core values, mission and culture in the midst of all this transition?

- **Client Service:** How you support your clients and the service you extend to them reflects your culture. How will this shift over the next 12 months? How can you connect with your clients in new ways to support them and their businesses during this unsettled time?

- **Corporate Social Responsibility:** How are you continuing to encourage mental wellness among your employees and clients? How are you ensuring both your team and your company are financially secure? How are you finding ways to support your local community and businesses?

OFFICE VISITORS

- **Visitor Entry:** Will you allow visitors and, if so, when? For what? Think about how to restrict where they are allowed within your physical location.

- **Visitor Hygiene and Safety Policies:** Will you require visitors to wear masks, take their temperatures, or fill out a COVID-19 questionnaire before being allowed on site?

- **Meetings:** How will you restrict meeting size and location? How will you ensure there is a time buffer between scheduled meetings to avoid overlap between two groups and to allow time for cleanings?

- **Reception:** What is proper Receptionist protocol in terms of interaction with guests? How will you provide a barrier that can be easily cleaned and prevent contact?

- **Sanitizing Supplies:** Be sure to provide antibacterial hand gel, disinfectant wipes and tissues in any area that may have visitors.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

- **Taskforce/Committee:** Form a task force responsible for setting organizational policies and procedures.

- **Stay Informed:** Who in the organization is responsible for keeping current on federal, state, and local public health guidance and information regarding COVID-19? Which reputable and reliable sources will your organization follow in terms of recommendations?

- **Communication with Employees:** How will your organization provide employees with education and training on COVID-19 risk factors, infection control, proper protocols and hygiene practices, and your organization's policies and procedures? Will you have them sign that they've participated in the training?

- **Families First Coronavirus Response Act:** Your COVID-19 Taskforce/Committee or HR provider needs to have a strong understanding of the new parameters and guidelines of the FFCRA when it comes to aspects of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Emergency Sick Leave program for COVID-19.

WORKPLACE COVID-19 PROCEDURES FOR EXPOSURE:

In addition to general safety practices, your organization needs a clear response plan if it's discovered that someone, or their family member, is suspected of having or has a confirmed case of COVID-19.

Your COVID-19 Taskforce/Committee should have a plan for both.

- **Identifying potential cases in the workplace:** What are your procedures to identify and isolate individuals who have symptoms/signs of COVID-19? How will you keep their identity confidential? What happens if a close family member of an employee has a suspected case? What are your processes for recording and/or reporting instances to OSHA and/or local and State authorities?

- **Quarantine:** If an employee has been exposed to COVID-19, they should be required to self-quarantine for 14 days (recommended by CDC).

- **Contact Tracing:** What are your plans for identifying and communicating to co-workers or others who may have come in contact with the infected employee?

One thing we are certain of when it comes to COVID-19 is that we still have a lot to learn. So bringing employees back into the office will not be like flipping a light switch. For the first time in history, we are going to reintroduce millions of people back into the US workforce in the midst of an infectious disease we are actively trying to suppress. Your organization's plans need to be flexible, adaptable to unexpected changes and provide the ability to shut back down as needed.

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