Whos On. Location

Ultimate Guide: Returning to work post COVID-19

As lockdowns are relaxed around the world and people start to return to their workplaces, the big challenge that businesses face is adapting office environments to a different way of working. So what will this look like? Without a doubt, there will be plenty of new safety protocols involving strict personal hygiene and physical distancing but how do we make this transition as simple and as safe as possible?

Staggered shifts and even 24/7 operations have been introduced to limit work-place numbers and keep distancing between workers but some of the challeng-es organizations are likely to face include:

- *ensuring people with COVID-19 symptoms stay off the premises*
- *maintaining physical distancing*
- *enabling good hygiene practices*
- *keeping track of people that enter the premises*

This whitepaper will outline what the transition back to the workplace means for your employees, visitors and service providers along with what we used to take for granted and how that has changed. We will also cover the new requirements of an employer and some technology that you should consider before you put your plan in place.

Lockdown is lifting in jurisdictions across the globe, workplaces are opening after weeks and in some cases months of closure.

What does this return to the workplace mean?

As employers, we are all navigating a different territory. The workplace we left weeks or months ago is unlikely to be the same when we return. We haven't experienced anything like this before, most organizations don't have plans in place on how to return to the workplace and if they do they haven't been tested and in these unprecedented times the reality is likely to be very different.
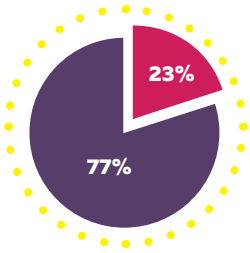
Some employees will be ready and willing to get back to work and into some sort of routine others will be slightly hesitant. In a recent survey conducted by Qualtrics workers of all ages – from Boomers to Gen Z – are equally uncomfortable going back to work. More than 65% in each age group reported "feeling uncomfortable returning to the workplace".

Our workplaces are now having to adapt and change, from physical distancing, providing PPE, increased frequency of cleaning, and become more compassionate to employees' situations be that family, child care, home life, or homeschooling.

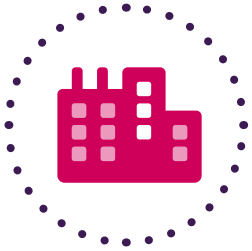# What do you need to consider as you transition back to the work-place ?

Employee Safety

With no vaccine in the near future employees will be feeling sensitive about their return to the workplace. As an employer, you play a vital role in keeping your employees safe while at work. Your number one consideration should be how you keep your employees safe as you all navigate a different workplace.

Even as we return to work and some sense of a normal life your employees will still have sensitivities towards COVID-19, especially in those jurisdictions where they are experiencing more challenges than others to contain the virus.

Helping employees

1. Give employees as much reassurance as possible that their workplace is safe and that you as the employer are managing your duty of care to keep them safe while they are in your care.
2. Limit stress and anxiety by giving employees as much notice as possible of your plans around a workplace return. This will allow them to start to put plans in place for their own lives, and start to change their mindset. The more notice they are given the less likely that a return to the workplace will add another stress or worry to them.
3. Give employees flexibility. Allow them to start later, finish early, or work from home as they navigate a return to daycare, school, and care for elderly de-pendents.

23%

77%

O.C. Tanner pulse surveys, 77% of employees doubt workplace culture will ever return to "normal" and 86.5% think it's too soon to go back to the workplace.

3

Communication is key

The role of communication goes way beyond emailing employees with your return to work plans.

- Ask your employees what they are concerned about and work to address the concerns.

- Clearly communicate what your plan is should an employee or guest test positive to COVID-19.

- Set the expectation that you take the health and safety of your employees very seriously.

- What your approach to work will be, will it be phased, will you be doing split weeks or days to manage occupancy and ensure employees can maintain their distance from others.

- Acknowledge that things previously may have been taken for granted; crowds, our commute or sitting next to other in the office have changed and may have some sensitivities round them.

- Environmental changes such as wearing PPE, distancing, sign in and out procedures and changes to guest policies will take time for employees to adjust to.

Don't communicate just once, keep the communication frequent and two way for the most successful transition back to working life.

Other things to consider

- What are the authorities in your jurisdiction saying? Is it safe to return to the workplace?

- Do you need to offer greater flexibility? 9 - 5 may no longer be the best for your employees.

- If you still have exposure to COVID-19, how are you going to manage this to ensure staff are aware of the process and protocol if they or someone in your workplace is exposed?

- Policies around who cannot come to work eg, ill, recent travel, possible exposure etc.

- Do you need to put employee screening in place and how will you do it, manually or by using technology?

- Can you add temperature checks to your entry and exit policies?

- Companies will need to re-onboard their furloughed staff when they do return to the office. It will be important that the business treats them as a new

In a recent survey conducted by Qualtrics less than a quarter 24% of people said they would feel comfortable returning to the workplace right now, 10% were neutral, and the majority 66% were uncomfortable.

member of staff, providing them time to settle in, and working hard to create a new sense of belonging.

· *Remind employees about services offered for them should they need support.*

· *Consider a deep clean and what an enhanced cleaning schedule will look like to reduce the transfer of infections.*

· *Have the right supplies in place; hand sanitizer, PPE if needed for your workplace, plastic gloves and disposable hand towels.*

57% of survey participants wanted masks available to anyone who wants one

Workplace transition checklist

Checklist	Y	N
1. Establish a requirement for employees returning to the workplace.		
2. Seek employee input into the return to work requirements and finalise.		
3. New technology implemented for touchless entry/exit, social distancing and contact tracing.		
4. Changes to cleaning frequency and method.		
5. Establish changes to employee screening processes.		
6. Define the policy for vulnerable employees.		
7. Policy for when an employee is required to stay at home ie. cold or flu like symptoms, recent travel.		
8. Stocked resources and equipment; hand sanitizer, PPE.		
9. Employee on-site roster developed.		
10. Seating rearranged for distancing.		
11. Employee reporting process if unwell.		
12. Thorough workplace deep clean prior to returning to work.		
13. Support for staff wellbeing and how they access.		

Checklist	Y	N
14. Review lockdown and returning to work procedures and how you could improve for the future.		

Your workplace is going to look very different to the one that your employees left. You will have different rules, structures, goals and expectations. Give yourselves and your employees time to adjust.

Technology to consider

The standard for a safe work environment now looks completely different to this time last year.

As we return to work, employees, service providers and visitors will ask more of their work spaces, leading organizations to look to technology for sophisticated solutions. So which technologies should you be considering? And which are best avoided?

People presence software

Visitors, employees, service providers, volunteers... By signing everyone in as they come on-site, you'll be able to quickly and easily report on who has come into contact with who, should someone in your organization become ill. People presence solutions are widely regarded as more robust solutions to the more flimsy 'contact tracing' apps we've seen popping up of late.

Access control

Turnstiles, fobs and other systems that allow employees to gain access to workplaces have been a staple for a long time. However, recent developments to this technology means it's perfect for the return to work.

For example, US-based Brivo integrates with people presence management software WhosOnLocation, making contact tracing in the workplace simple.

The integration also helps to create a hands-free visitor experience. The two systems sync seamlessly, allowing visitors to use the barcodes on their badges to unlock doors. Full control over which doors can be opened is configurable in-app, so you can grant visitors access to entrances, exits and bathrooms without the need to share employee badge passes.

Physical distancing detection

Silicon Valley-based AI company Landing AI has developed technology that works with security cameras to detect if people are keeping a safe physical distance from each other. This data could then be used to understand where workplace layout changes might be required to allow employees more space.

In a similar vein, car manufacturers Ford are trialling wristbands that buzz if a colleague gets too close.

Technology to be cautious of

Contact tracing apps

Contact tracing apps are all over the news, and new providers are popping up almost overnight. However, many of these apps pose security issues and don't offer a complete, robust solution.

Air quality solutions

The concept of monitoring indoor air quality isn't a new one, but it's something that could be top-of-mind for facilities and operations managers post COVID-19.

While improved air quality has many benefits, there is little evidence to suggest air purifiers can help reduce the spread of coronavirus. Although some purifiers might be strong enough to kill a small number of air borne viral particles, coronavirus is primarily spread by person-to-person contact, or contact with contaminated surfaces

UV sanitizers

There are a number of UV light sanitizers on the market, claiming to effectively kill viruses and sanitize your gadgets. However, only the strongest, most aggressive rays (UVC) are capable of killing coronavirus, and to use UVC safely, you need specialist equipment and training. This cleaning method is best left to the experts.

New ways to welcome your guests

As we return to work, your organization might ask employees to avoid in-person meetings where possible. Initially, we could see organizations politely refusing entry to anyone who isn't a permanent employee, and asking employees not to travel for work.

However, there are instances where an in-person meeting is simply unavoidable, and eventually, we'll get to a place where we start to transition back to this way of working.

When this time comes, it's important we make visitors feel safe and welcomed again, and give employees the confidence that their health will not be compromised. So how can this be achieved?

Keep a digital record of everyone who comes on-site

As we've seen throughout this pandemic, contact tracing is key to controlling the spread of COVID-19. When opening up your facility to visitors, it's important you can keep a record of who the visitor came into contact with, and keep their details easily accessible in the event someone in your facility becomes ill.

The old, manual sign in book simply isn't up to this job. A digital visitor management service is a much safer and more secure way to ensure you can contact trace if you need to. Most systems will come with reporting capabilities, for example with WhosOnLocation, you can easily report on everyone who was on-site, who hosted which visitors and even which zone of the facility they entered on any given day.

Implement, and communicate, a strict visitor policy

While there's no way to 100% guarantee you're preventing COVID-19 from entering your workplace, a strict visitor policy can help you mitigate some of the risks.

Some threats are easily avoidable, so your visitor policy should be thorough. For example, you should consider restricting access to anyone who:

- *Has recently returned from overseas*

- *Has been unwell, or experienced flu-like symptoms in the past 14 days*

- *Has been in contact with anyone suffering from COVID-19 in the past 14 days*

You should also give your visitors the courtesy of communicating your visitor policy in advance, to avoid cancelled meetings and unnecessary trips.

Whilst this is a potentially time consuming task in itself, some of the more powerful visitor management systems out there can automate (and fool proof) the process for you. For example, WhosOnLocation offers an incredibly useful visitor pre-registration feature, including a calendar integration. This allows employees to pre-register their own guests automatically, simply by sending a calendar invite. This generates an email for the guest, known as a WolPass, and can include details such as directions to your facility, instructions on where to park or, crucially, your pandemic visitor policy.

Enable touchless sign in

The only down-side to many visitor management systems is the need for visitors to touch an iPad or tablet kiosk in order to sign in for their visit – a process that potentially contributes to the spread of viruses and bacteria.

Choosing a system with some flexibility is key to this. You'll need to look for a solution that allows your front of house team to sign visitors in on their behalf – or better still, offers a self-serve touchless option. WhosOnLocation's WolPass includes a QR or barcode that can be scanned at the kiosk for quick, easy and touchless sign in.

Protecting your service providers

We've already touched on ways to protect your employees, and when it comes to service providers much of the same guidance applies. However, there are some extra measures you might want to consider.

Control access rights

In the initial days of opening up your site, you may wish to limit the number of people and service provider organizations who can access your facility whilst you establish new physical distancing and cleaning protocols.

This can be easily managed through location access settings, to temporarily restrict access to all members from a certain service provider organization.

Keep in touch

Service providers can often feel like full-time employees, and it's certainly important to communicate with them in the same way you would your permanent team.

One idea is to use the same workplace management apps you offer to employees. The WhosOnLocation smartphone app (WolMobile) is great for this. You can send important updates and notices to everyone on-site, regardless of whether they're an employee or a service provider.

So should you need to close an area of the site for extensive cleaning, or ask all employees and service providers to return home to self isolate, you can send an instant message quickly and easily.

Touchless sign in

The same WolMobile app can also be used for touchless sign in. Go completely hands free by enabling the auto sign in/out feature that uses geofencing technology to detect when a service provider has entered or exited your site, updating their status in WhosOnLocation as they go.

Whether your organization is already in the process of returning to work, or just beginning to plan, these tips should help create a smooth transition for all, so you can focus on keeping those in your duty of care safe.