Return to the Workplace: A Step-by-Step Guide for Leaders

What are the considerations and decisions leaders need to make as we transition back to normal campus operations?

As faculty and staff return to the workplace, leaders will need to consider many factors to facilitate a healthy and safe return for all. Guidelines have been put in place to assist with this process, but there are still many decisions that will need to be made specific to each leader's team and situation. This step-by-step guide is designed to provide leaders with a framework to formulate a return plan that promotes the safety and well-being of our entire UF community.

Part 1—Take a Step-by-Step Approach

Step 1: Gather information. There are a lot of factors to consider with returning to the workplace. You'll want to start by assessing what you know and what you need to learn more about in order to come up with the best plan for your team. Part 2 below includes important topics to explore and direct links with resources to support you.

Step 2: Talk to Your team. Set aside time as a team and with each individual to discuss the factors related to this transition. Be honest and transparent — share what you know and what you don't know. Allow for questions and make note of concerns. Additionally, consider prefacing these discussions with "at this time" in the event you receive new information and need to change direction. Use this time to brainstorm and consider new possibilities for ways of work that may have emerged as positive and productive. Be sure to continue regular, 1:1 check-ins with your employees to keep them apprised moving forward.

Step 3: Draft your plan. Each of the areas listed in Part 2 below should be carefully reviewed and considered in the context of how it will impact your team. Once you have spent some personal time thinking through each component, be sure to incorporate these topics into individual and team meeting discussions in an ongoing basis. There will be unexpected events along the way, so it's important to proactively address questions and concerns and work together.

Step 4: Support Emotional Well-Being. Managing the stress, anxiety, fear and other emotions generated by this pandemic has been challenging for most of us. Remember to encourage your team to reach out for help if they need it.
- UF Employee Assistance Program
- UFHR Wellness Website
- The CDC has created a list of resources for coping with stress: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/managing-stress-anxiety.html.

Step 5: Remain Flexible, Adaptable and Open to Change. Creating a plan is a great place to start, but leaders should be mindful that many things are likely to change. Model adaptability and flexibility with your teams by focusing on what you have control over and harnessing the creative energy that comes from even small successes along the way. Highlight the ways your team has been resilient, solved problems, or even created innovations never before thought possible. Continue to seek feedback from your team about ways they are managing with this "new normal," and adjust as needed.

Part 2—Issues to Consider and Resources to Help

Screening and return to the workplace. If you haven't already done so, you'll want to inform your team of the upcoming request to complete the screening and the subsequent recommended testing. Check out the screening and return to workplace page for a step-by-step overview of this process. Even if your team will be in a later phase of this process, giving them a heads-up now will be important so they are not surprised later.
- Visit the UF Health Screen, Test, & Protect page for more information on this initiative.
- Review the University Institutional Recovery and COVID-19 Return to the Workplace policy. This link provides guidance on what is required of UF employees for COVID-19 screening, returning to work, and working to create a safer environment (clarifies requirements and actions for non-compliance).

Workspace environment. Talk to your employees about the accountable behavior each person will need to display in order to keep your workspace safer, healthier, and productive.
- Handwashing: https://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/index.html
- Face covering: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html
- UF health created this short video on handwashing and mask-wearing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1eeQeAe80A
- Physical distancing: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html

Assess your team's workstation conditions including spacing, modifications, and accessibility of sanitation supplies.
- Check out the cubicle guidelines for the do's and don'ts of workspace layouts to determine necessary changes or if the employee may be required to wear a mask while at their workstation.
- For common meeting spaces such as conference rooms, consider the occupancy limits necessary in order to maintain the recommended physical distancing (include options for virtual attendance when possible). Post signage to reflect these occupancy limits.
- Discourage equipment sharing if at all possible. If equipment must be shared, provide sanitation supplies for disinfection after each use.
- Post signage throughout the workspace to promote the best practices for physical distancing, mask wearing, and handwashing. Click this link for signage available for immediate download and use.

Employee work schedules and location. Consider possibilities for alternative schedules that would reduce the number of people in the workspace at a given time while still preserving productivity and quality of service, such as:

- Staggered shifts or alternate days
- Remote work full- or part-time. If you have any positions you think would benefit from continued remote work, there are many important factors to consider.
  - Visit the Alternate Work Location page for detailed policy information and specific requirements as well as the necessary forms to request approval. Please note: this process renews July 1st each year.
  - Also visit the Working Remotely During COVID-19 page for guidance on decision-making related to remote work, including information for supervisors and departments.
  - Access the Working Remotely resources provided by UFIT to set your employees up for long-term success
  - Determine parameters for decision-making (what are your "must-haves")
    - Preserve team culture and values
    - Promote collaboration
    - Increase efficiency and/or productivity

Employee specific situations. There are a number of unique situations that may arise during this return to the workplace process. For guidance on a range of employee-related situations (e.g., refusing screening, not wearing mask, vulnerable population), consult the Return to Workplace Matrix.

- There are many leave options available for employees with unique situations. Visit the Guidance on Taking Leave page for more information.
- If an employee isn't feeling well or has been affected in some way by COVID-19, use this chart to help you determine next steps to ensure safer practices for all.
- Accommodations: If you have an employee who would like to seek an accommodation, they will need to submit a request form through the ADA office.
- Do you have a staff member who is interested in the COVID-19 Retirement Incentive? You can refer them to this page for more detailed information and steps to follow.

Still have questions? Check out the Frequently Asked Questions

Additional Resources
Returning to the Workplace: Leading through Transition- A job aid describing how to leverage the leadership competencies necessary to promote a trusting, safe, and mission-driven return to the workplace.

Remote Work: To Be or Not To Be- A recorded webinar for supervisors who are considering which positions may be suited for more long-term remote work either on a full time or part time basis.

Manager Guidelines for a Safe Return to the Workplace- A recorded webinar for supervisors discussing some of the policies for returning to the workplace and resources to support the decision-making process.