VRS Guide:
Bring Your Team Back to Work
with Maximum Safety and Wellness Post COVID-19
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There’s no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the world of work. Once companies begin bringing their employees back to the office, it won’t be “business as usual.”

This has likely been one of the toughest times in our lives personally and professionally, and many of us are feeling overwhelmed. Our colleagues and we may have dealt with the loss of loved ones, health challenges, layoffs in the family, food and money insecurity, financial hardships, childcare issues, complicated family dynamics, loss of routine, worries about the economy and the financial health of our companies and businesses, mental health issues, and the psychology of social restrictions.
Overview

Because of this, grief and stress threaten to overwhelm opportunities to re-enter the workplace well. While we don't know the true length of this crisis or the global impact or ramifications, it’s important for businesses of all sizes to turn their attention toward the future to be better equipped to recognize and solve challenges and come up with a solid strategy to ease office tensions and uncertainties. There are some new realities we would need to take into account as we formulate a sensible game plan while preparing our team and ourselves for a gradual return to business operations.

We prepared some tips from our team to yours to help you foster a safe and healthy environment for your employees - in and out of the office.
Prepare the Workplace

- Consult medical, legal, and regulatory sources and experts to help you revise certain policies and office layout to conform to new guidelines and standards.

- Companies may want to find ways to assess the relative risks associated with different jobs, reevaluate their office’s air filtration system, provide personal protective equipment, or add other enhanced safety and health measures.

- Create a strategy for remote working in the future. What worked this time, and what didn’t? Even consider designating one day a year when all employees work from home.

- Update or create the company’s plan to help employees prepare for future emergencies/pandemics, including mock drills.

- **Revisit and strengthen** your company’s overall physical security posture. Rising levels of conflict and violence are being driven by emerging trends such as surging gun sales, racial tensions, social distancing tensions, domestic terrorism including active shooters, and domestic violence spillover driven by the fear and anger over the multitude of recent triggers caused by the COVID-19 crisis. If you do not already have a unified conflict and violence prevention system, set up an appointment with someone on our team.
Help People Acclimate

Be human, be understanding, and be empathetic.

Have organic and informal group discussions to allow people to share their feelings and needs.

Circulate and see how people are doing. Some call this Management by Walking Around (MBWA), and it shows employees that you care and keeps you aware of what’s going on in the office.

Don’t be afraid to admit what has been difficult for you personally about reintegration into society as this provides a level of “cohesiveness” with employees.
Consider creative and fun benefits the company can afford to implement (e.g., catered lunches or team-building games that require minimal physical contact).

Remember, there are many resources available to ease stress and anxiety for you and your employees, including mobile apps such as Headspace and Calm, and these helpful tips from the CDC.
Communicate and Educate

Make a general written announcement acknowledging the events that caused our world to change and how our response can unite us in moving forward. You can also acknowledge workload, overtime, expected pressures, and difficulties and that you intend to support any needs that should arise. It is also appropriate to ask for patience navigating uncharted waters while you and your team create a safe space for everyone.

Emphasize that you’re all in this together. Open to your employees’ ideas in the conversation about going back to work. Create a strategy for remote working in the future. What worked this time, and what didn’t? Even consider designating one day a year when all employees work from home.
Help people understand the issues related to layoffs, furloughs, and terminations, as well as the fiscal health of the company. How did we do during the crisis? How much business did we gain/lose? What client/partner feedback do we have? Is the company on strong footing for the remainder of the year?

• Conduct regular virtual town hall style meetings with food.

• Continually educate employees on how to avoid contracting COVID-19, identify the symptoms, and communicate how you will respond to an employee who shows symptoms at work.

• Request employees to register their mobile numbers with the company emergency comms system so they can be notified of sudden closure of facilities.

• Provide assurance that the company will identify and mitigate elevated physical security threats in the areas of conflict and violence driven by the heightened emotions created by the crisis.
Provide Flexibility, Protection, and Resources

Once employees start coming back to work, consider allowing them to work half-days for the first 90 days. Develop a tiered or phased approach that gradually resumes normal business operations. You can also utilize staggered shifts and alternating WFH days to reduce the number of people commuting in peak periods and being and in the office at the same time or in close proximity to each other. A gradual return to the office would help maintain social distancing.

- Work with your HR team to allow flexible sick leave or WFH for associates with health concerns about coming into the offices or customer facilities. Alternatively, those with child care issues might need WFH flexibility. Parents can't go back to work if schools and daycares aren't open.
Provide Flexibility, Protection, and Resources

Accept and plan for lower productivity since not only is the country in an unavoidable economic downturn, but people may not psychologically be themselves right away. There may be increased absenteeism. They need to recover and re-acquaint themselves with their routine, their typical “work self” and their colleagues. Let people spend a bit more time sharing and processing, which means less time at their desks doing actual work - at least for now.

- Communicate new policies on social distancing, enhanced cleaning procedures, and redesigned layout of desks, cubicles, and confined workspaces. Provide guidelines for how employees should handle/address/report social distancing violations or colleagues who appear sick.
Provide Flexibility, Protection, and Resources

Emphasize the efforts of the company to ensure a safe and healthy working environment for everyone. Acknowledge situations that may require individualized help and the ways the company can make resources accessible.

Consider engaging a part-time onsite psychologist/therapist for employees who need it

- Share which EAP programs you have to help employees with short and long term needs in the areas of financial counseling, mental health and wellness support, domestic violence resources, and medical resources.

- Assess IT/cybersecurity: vulnerabilities by employees returning to work (are they bringing outside computer viruses into the workplace?). Be aware of COVID-related scams and intrusions.
Maintain a Healthy Work Environment

Ensure your employees that you are doing everything you can to keep everyone safe and healthy. This might include onsite medical personnel taking temperatures or testing all people on site, developing policies for identifying and isolating people, or creating a response plan for infectious diseases. Ensure you are compliant with federal guidelines.

- Have high risk employees, or those with high risk household members continue to WFH.

- Restrict all forms of travel, movement within the office, and use of common areas to minimize the impact of exposure. Consider using video conferencing even within the office environment.

- Respond to new exposure incidents by closing the office, deep cleaning, and then reopening the office when it’s safe. If this happens more than a couple of times, consider reinstating WFH for two-to-four weeks.

- Have managers and office leaders continue to enforce social distancing and good hygiene practices in the office. Even set up extra cleaning stations throughout the office (hand sanitizer, gloves, masks, and disposable wipes for computers, keyboards, desks, etc.).
Follow Regulatory Standards

To ensure you are compliant and for more detailed tips, please consult the following resources:

- OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19
- Interim recommendations from the CDC
- OSHA recommendations by industry

Rebuild Together

Keeping the lines of communication open with your employees and letting them know that you’re doing everything you can to keep them safe and healthy is extra critical during this uncertain time. By creating strategies to help employees transition back to the workplace in a safe manner will help ease some anxieties and fears while building a hopeful, healthy, and prosperous future for us all.
Founded in 2015, Vigilance Risk Solutions (VRS) is a technology company that specializes in conflict and violence prevention. VRS helps clients to identify and mitigate unknown threats of conflict and violence both within and outside their company, protecting them from the three most damaging consequences of conflict and violence in the workplace: litigation, physical and psychological harm, and brand/reputational damage. If we can be of any help, please book a time to speak with us.

VRS Team

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