



Returning to the office can be hard – Learn how Management can make it Easy

By Guest Author – December 03, 2021

By *Ajay Kaul*, managing partner at [AgreeYa Solutions](#)

As the world has started to return to normal after the pandemic, organizations are enthusiastic about bringing employees back to the office. Employees are also looking forward to trading in their endless Zoom calls and virtual conferences for face-to-face interactions. Some employees who were hired during the pandemic have not even had the opportunity to meet their teams or visit a physical office. While there is a lot of excitement, coming back to the office might also cause hesitation. Employees got accustomed to working safely and comfortably at home or from other remote locations. Therefore, organizations will have to support employees with not just the physical transition, but also the psychological one.

Adapting to the new working model

Organizations and their management have recognized that the working model has revolutionized and the workforce will have to continue prioritizing employee health and safety. In addition, with a hybrid model being the way of the future, they will have to continue to adapt to be more flexible to meet employee expectations.

Managers, along with employees, have adjusted as best they could amid the pandemic, but now as organizations are ready to welcome their employees back to the office, they need to ask themselves:

- **How will we ensure employee safety?**

Health and safety needs to remain a top concern for every type of organization. Moving forward, organizations will have to examine and re-evaluate their procedures and protocols keeping this in mind.

- **What should be the working strategy?**

The hybrid working model has gained traction, but now organizations have to decide whether they will continue with the conventional working model or will reconsider other options.

- **How can we improve employee experiences once they come back?**

Bringing employees back after the longest stretch of remote work most have experienced will require management to explore how they can maintain a positive work experience for employees amid this transition.

As most employees have become accustomed to working from the comfort of their home, management also needs to consider their role in helping their team with the transition. Here are four things managers can focus on.

Reinforce connections to improve workplace interactions

Humans are social creatures and like to work in an engaging environment. Remote work made this difficult, especially for new hires who might not have had an opportunity to build camaraderie with the team.

Organizations, managers, and team members should help employees regain connections and rebuild a positive work culture that involves the free flow of interactions irrespective of roles and designations.

Video conferencing might have helped a lot in times of social distancing and lockdowns, but at the same time, these were exhausting and nowhere close to in-office coffee breaks, in-person time, etc. Management can create opportunities for employees to engage with one another. This can include:

1. Social events to improve employee interaction and engagement.
2. New policies and practices that reinforce that employee engagement and satisfaction are your organization's topmost priority.
3. Engage employees in more one-to-one conversations with their peers and team leaders.

Innovate the workplace for better collaboration

For employees to be creative and innovative in their work, organizations and management need to renovate the workplace from time to time. Employees' creativity at work can improve when they get involved in hallway conversations and impromptu breaks.

Opportunities to connect outside of just a work conversation were limited or even non-existent with virtual conferences and meetings. However, encouraging this can help employees feel recognized and thus more attached to the organizations—ultimately performing more efficiently. These small initiatives can improve the collaboration among team members and management:

1. Encourage employees to take their work breaks with team members.
2. Ask employees to discuss their learning on a daily basis.
3. Engage in conversations apart from work.

Address the psychological impact of the pandemic

The pandemic affected everyone differently. As a result, the psychological state of each employee will vary and need to be handled with care. Organizations should support employees who have lost loved ones, were sick themselves, or were impacted in other ways, as for these individuals coming back to the new normal may be difficult. By focusing on the workplace culture and providing flexibility in workspaces and physical proximity, managers can help ease the transition.

Continue a balance between in-office and remote work

The hybrid working model can help employees adjust to the transition. Employees have become accustomed to the flexibility and autonomy that remote working has offered. Therefore, management should keep those factors in mind when bringing employees back to the office.

A hybrid working model can provide a win-win for both sides. A hybrid working model is best for a better employee value proposition according to a [BCG \(Boston Consulting Group\) survey](#).

Those interested in offering a hybrid model can consider:

1. **Autonomous model:** In this model, employees have the autonomy to decide the days they will work from the office in a month. This working model helps employees maintain a work-life balance.
2. **Weekly model:** This is a great hybrid model that allows employees to visit the office two to three days a week and work from home the rest. This model works best for maintaining social distancing protocols at the workplace while simultaneously supporting collaboration and meeting deadlines.
3. **Working in shifts model:** This model works on a shift basis, i.e., morning and evening shifts. Such a model brings in the next level of flexibility for the employees. This model best suits employees who have to take care of loved ones at home.

How AgreeYa has successfully managed its office

The health and safety of employees is a key priority for AgreeYa. Thus, its unique work from office model was designed with this as a priority. Keeping in mind individual employees' family health, mental health, and other parameters, AgreeYa offers a voluntary return to office working model.

This works well as there are employees who feel safer working from home, while others feel that they are more productive working from the office. Hence, a voluntary hybrid working model addresses both situations simultaneously and keeps the business running.

To successfully manage this voluntary return to office working model, AgreeYa's IT and admin teams collaboratively developed an employee mobility portal where teams can easily put in "coming to office" requests. The portal facilitates an overview of all the people coming to the office on a particular day, including their vaccination status. AgreeYa made sure that all employees who work from the office have proof of full vaccination status.

This information helps admin teams make all necessary arrangements and put stronger health and safety protocols in place to ensure a safe working environment for everyone.

The support team also plays an integral role. They give special attention to keeping the workplace well sanitized and made significant modifications to the in-office infrastructure to abide by social distancing regulations. Here are some changes made to ensure workplace safety:

- Conducted a hazard assessment of the workplace to identify any hazards leading to virus spread or other health-related risks.
- Emphasized the common areas with high points of contact like break rooms, meeting rooms, etc.
- Maintained a balanced ratio of employees working from the office to working from home.
- Installed a sufficient number of physical barriers to eliminate unnecessary contact.
- Increased the overall airflow supply to all the spaces inside the office.
- Arranged enhanced cleaning and disinfection after any employee who appeared in the office detected symptoms.
- Motivated employees to perform regular self-checks at home.

As the transition to work from home was filled with unknown challenges, returning to the office can be equally challenging for some. However, with the right plan and mindset, it can be successfully achieved. Management can play a prominent role in creating a well-planned return to the office solution to support employees. It can also be beneficial to use this time to re-evaluate roles, create a better experience for talent, improve collaboration and productivity, and reduce costs.



Ajay Kaul is a visionary leader and trendsetter. As managing partner of [AgreeYa Solutions](#), he has been instrumental in leading the company through solid growth and international expansion for the past 20 years. Kaul has three decades of experience building powerful and innovative solutions for businesses across various industries and verticals. His expertise and knowledge span across enterprise sales management, marketing and strategy, global delivery and mergers and acquisitions. Follow AgreeYa on social media @agreeyasolutions.