

Back-to-work checklist for mindful leaders

Transitioning back to the workplace is on many Canadians' minds as we focus on what will hopefully be a gradual recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. For many of us, this will be a significant change in our routines, which can bring about unique stressors. For others, being in the workplace throughout the pandemic has come with other challenges.

Maybe you're already thinking about how you can support employees or your teammates as you move forward. Or maybe you know you need to but aren't sure where to start.

It's best to start by taking good care of your well-being. Find balance so you can be a role model for your colleagues or employees. Of course, if you're a leader, you'll also need to ensure your workplace follows the necessary health guidelines to protect your employees.

Consider the following as you work to support your teammates or employees in the weeks and months ahead.

Validate the range of emotions they're likely to experience. These will range from extreme anxiety over returning to a changed workplace to relief and excitement about getting out of isolation. If you share up front that either extreme or anything in between is to be expected, you can help normalize these emotions.

Acknowledge it may be stressful until it eventually becomes more routine. Manage expectations in advance to allow employees to feel more comfortable with being uncomfortable.

Ask employees or teammates to share their fears and concerns about returning to work or about their current circumstances at work. Address as many as you can to help eliminate or reduce some stressors.

Share how you will help protect them. Be specific about:

- Steps you take
- Special measures you're putting in place
- Equipment you'll provide
- How you'll deal with co-workers or clients who violate your rules

Ask employees what other protection they feel they need. Double check to see if other approaches would support your employees or teammates to successfully do their jobs.

Take it slow in terms of expectations. Acknowledge that productivity could be reduced while some employees learn new processes. For example, they may need to learn about using personal protective equipment or take time to adjust to their new routines. They also need time to adjust to working with others if they've been working on their own for more than a couple months. The energy required to get themselves and their family up, dressed and out the door can be draining until it becomes more routine again.

Celebrate and recognize effort – every day. Help build confidence and morale by identifying how employees or teammates are rising to the occasion despite the changes and challenges.

Talk about how it feels. Every week (or more often if you can), take time to talk about how people are doing. This is about more than just how their job is going. Don't hesitate to ask them:

- How they're coping
- What strategies they're using to get through the day
- How they find balance in their lives

It may inspire others when you share these ideas as a team. This discussion might support a new and improved "normal" going forward.

Work to build resilience personally and with your team. This has always been sound advice. Learning to bounce back from challenges should be part of continual improvement for us all. There are many free resources to help you do this. One of them, is the [Plan for resilience](#). Be sure to check it out.

Consider becoming a Mindful Leader. This certification will demonstrate your intention and will give you practical approaches to resolving workplace issues and supporting employee success. Learn more at mindfulemployer.ca.

This checklist was created by Mary Ann Baynton and Sarah Jenner.

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