

Heading Back to the Office Checklist

By Mark Deese

As many office workers around North America see the light at the end of the working-from-home tunnel, we need to prepare to adjust our business practices. I'll be making some changes to ensure colleagues and customers feel safe and comfortable working with me. Here's a checklist of areas to consider adjusting as you return to the office.



1. Reconfigure your space.

If your company has resources like office managers, HR teams and corporate real estate departments, your workspace will likely be adjusted before you return to the office. If you are a business owner or in a less structured environment, you'll need to create space between desks and address high-traffic areas. If possible, convert hallways to one-way flows and limit elevator capacity to just a couple people at a time. Adding sanitation stations or supplying every desk with sanitizer is an easy adjustment as well.



2. Ask for and provide flexibility.

These times are still anything but business-as-usual. Many children won't return to school until the fall, travel may continue to be limited by many companies, and public transportation could be reduced. Whether you need a flexible schedule, or you need to continue working remotely, make sure your company knows what flexibility you need. Provide colleagues, partners, and vendors with the same courtesy and patience.



3. Provide digital options for meeting.

Some people can't wait to get back in the office, while a Gallup poll reports that more than 60% would like to continue working from home. Whether colleagues, customers and partners are choosing to work from home or don't feel safe meeting in person yet, continue to provide the option of digital meetings.



4. Get comfortable with awkwardness.

For those who will resume in-person meetings, consider breaking the habit of shaking hands as an introduction. Opt instead for a wave, head tilt or bow. Additionally, choose a space to meet that is larger than needed and ensure there is extra space between everyone at the table. Between these two new best practices, I'm imagining some initial awkwardness, but it's worth it to help others feel safe meeting with you.



6. Ditch the business cards.

People might be hesitant to swap business cards for a while. Personally, I prefer connecting on LinkedIn (especially using the convenient QR scan feature) rather than trading business cards anyway. Connecting on LinkedIn allows me to learn more about my new contact via their posts and I never lose their information. Digital business cards are also great options.



7. Adjust your sales strategy.

After a couple months of working remotely, you may already know what parts of your sales cycle are much harder without in-person interaction. Now is the time to get creative and research tools and technology that can fill the gaps and provide an equally pleasant customer experience. For instance, if you normally take a prospective customer to dinner after a meeting, now you might send a bottle of wine they can enjoy at home.



8. Stay home when sick, period.

We all have known people who go to work with a cold or bug because they think taking the time off will put them or the company behind, will make them appear uncommitted, or because they think they are on the mend. Hopefully the pandemic has put an end to stigmatized sick time. Now that we know we can work from home, we need to take that option when we feel ill; it's the right thing to do.

As we move forward, I believe we'll find that many of the adjustments we've made during the pandemic can make us more efficient, healthier, happier and more flexible. And hey, if I never need to wear a suit jacket again, I'm okay with that, too.



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