




Effective Communications for the **Return to Work**



Employees look to their companies as a source of information they can rely on to stay safe and informed.

As leaders, we have a responsibility to communicate early, accurately, and frequently about how we plan to reopen the workplace. Here are some best practices for communication during the return:



Align and Distribute Quickly

To ensure that communication is accurate and timely, leadership must first align on the return to work communication plan, including information to be provided and the communication schedule.

Once this is determined, it's equally as important to distribute information quickly, using a variety of digital channels where employees are most apt to receive it. This can include email, portals, and collaboration sites. Physical signage may be necessary as well. This might also take the form of posted notices in shared areas like kitchens and break rooms.



Provide Clear, **Frequent Updates**

Situations can change quickly and often, so communication frequency is paramount.

Without ongoing communication from the company, employees will “fill in the gaps” with other sources of information, which can create confusion. It’s important to be clear, even when things are fluid. Companies may be taking a variety of steps as they assess recommendations from health agencies and government officials. Clarify with employees that these steps may change and outline what future actions might be taken depending on the status of the situation.

When it comes to message content, it’s critical to remain factual. One of the best ways to do this is to always include links to sites such as the CDC Guidance on Re-Opening, OSHA Guidance on Preparing Workplaces, or the Families First Coronavirus Response Act.

Personalize the Message

Employee groups are diverse, so our communications should be adapted accordingly.

Communications should be crafted based on different employee audiences. For example, certain job levels, such as people managers, may warrant specific communication. Employees working from different places, such as remote workers, factory workers, and those working in a corporate office will each require guidance that is suited to their situation. One way to ensure that messages get through to employees is to involve front-line managers, who garner a lot of trust among their teams. Communicate the strategy to your managers, educate them on the proper ways to handle these situations, and give them all the tools they need to communicate with their teams and continue building trust.

One common challenge that will need to be addressed, both through people managers and general communications, is the reorganization of the workplace. Provide clear communication around employee spacing, rules for interpersonal conduct, and the ways in which health and safety will be accounted for. This messaging should touch on general company protocols, as well as those that apply to specific work sites.

When communicating the return to work, see the situation from your employees' perspectives. They will want messaging that answers questions around working from home options, travel, what to do if an employee gets sick, caring for family members, and dealing with continued school closures. Getting communication out to diverse groups in ways they are likely to receive and digest the information is critical.



Get Feedback and Measure Sentiment

With the situation evolving rapidly, we shouldn't assume our communication is a "one-and-done" event.

Internal communications should be an ongoing, continuous journey that we help to guide our employees through. One common myth about communication is that, "I've sent it, so I've communicated it." What business leaders need to know is whether employees have digested, understood, and taken action on our communication. This information is even more critical when changes are coming suddenly and frequently, as they are now.

To ensure that no employees are left behind as plans progress, make sure to increase check-ins during the return to work. Best practices indicate that in order to make necessary adjustments in our communication plan, we should get feedback and measure engagement, both quantitatively (do employees have the resources they need in returning to work?) and qualitatively (how comfortable are employees with working in a shared space?).



Overcome Change Fatigue and **Empower Employees**

With accelerated transformation initiatives due to COVID-19, don't let constant change discourage your employees.

The pandemic has created a climate of uncertainty and continuous change, which can be exhausting. Businesses and leaders have had to adapt quickly to changing environments. Along the way, many companies will see employees experiencing burnout, high levels of stress, or detachment from work. But some of these issues can be remedied with timely, mindful communication. Avoid change fatigue in your employees by clearly explaining your change initiative and keeping an open line of communication between leaders and employees. Regularly assessing employees' experiences, equipping managers to personalize communications for individuals, and extending employees the resources they need to make these changes are all ways to facilitate a successful reopening.

Consistently inform and reassure employees as they **return to work.**

All organizations are facing challenges in returning to work. Companies will have to decide what their optimal workspace configuration looks like, and which policies must be implemented for the health and safety of employees. This will look different for every company, and for every employee base. Your reliable communications around workplace changes are an important element of being a change-ready organization, and a crucial part of helping your employees to weather the storm.



Accelerating change effectiveness
through **communication.**