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Returning to the Office After COVID-19:
A Checklist for Businesses

As countries, states, and cities have been easing lockdown restrictions, this checklist for reopening the office can help you jumpstart your return.

You and your employees have been quarantined in your homes for the past few months (although it many feel more like "forever"). Now that authorities are lifting restrictions and opening up you may be thinking, "We're going back, and I can get out of this house!" The problem is, if you just pick up and go, and don 't prepare for having people back in the office, you may run into issues that could have been easily avoided. Now is the time to prepare, even if you've already started the your reopening process.

This checklist is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but it can help provide guidance as you look to reopen the office. It's organized into four sections: People, Office Space, Technology, and Your Clients. Everyone's situation is unique, but evaluating your plan with these components in mind can help you get organized, anticipate obstacles and be better prepared in the future.

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People

Keep in mind that your team may be nervous about returning to th e office. If you prepare properly, you can alleviate many concerns for your employees, enabling them to focus on the work, not on the global health crisis. You and your employees should expect that returning to the office will not be the same as it was prior to COVID-19. The new normal is, and will be different for the foreseeable future.

- ☐ **Create a "Return to the Office" taskforce, or point person.**

  Depending on the size of your organization, consider appointing someone, or an entire team, to lead the efforts of assessing and optimizing the office for return. They will also help communicate changes and updates to employees.

- ☐ **Over communicate to your staff about returning to the office.**

  Make sure they understand what precautions you have taken, and assure them they can return to the office safely.

- ☐ **Create a "Return to the Office" schedule.**

  Your goal is to manage how many people are arriving and working in the office throughout the day and week. Consider developing a profile that assesses each employee based on their need to physically be in the office, potential COVID-19 exposure, commute methods (do they take public transportation?), and other considerations (like childcare, for example). Use the profile to build out your priority list for those who are first to return to the office. Consider a phased approach with a schedule that rotates between Work From Home, and work from the office.

- ☐ **Establish an ongoing Work From Home policy.**

  This will help to ensure your office isn't overly crowded. It will also enable those employees who are concerned about returning to the office to "take it slow," will help you establish safe, socially distanced working arrangements in the office, and will support your employees with children at home due to school cancellations.

- ☐ **Review and update your policies.**

  Look at sick leave, vacation time, travel policies, etc., and determine if you should make any changes or updates based on COVID-19.

- ☐ **Encourage appropriate safety practices in your office.**

  Practices include frequent hand washing, use of hand sanitizers, eliminating high-touch areas, and wiping down work spaces.

- ☐ **Tell employees to stay home if they, or someone they live with feels sick or exhibits any known COVID-19 symptoms.**

  This may seem obvious, but it needs to be explained to your employees..

- ☐ **Encourage your employees to "ease" into the grind they may experience when they return to the office.**

  Expect that your employees will be "out of office shape" when they return. Working at home is very different than working in an office. Encourage frequent breaks, and expect that people will need to adjust.

- ☐ **Check with local health officials about health screening recommendations.**

  You may want to consider a daily health screening procedure, such as temperature checks, but make sure you reach out to your legal representative for guidance before you deploy any new procedure.

- ☐ **Establish an open line of communication with your employees.**

  Create a cadenced stream of communication with your employees and ensure they understand the channels available to them should they have questions, comments, or concerns.

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Office Space

While the office may be open, practicing social distancing will still be of utmost importance. Be prepared to make changes to your floor plans, conference rooms, and office signage to ensure your employees can abide by social distancing guidelines. Your goal is to create an office environment that is safe for all employees.

- ☐ **Perform a thorough office cleaning before you reopen the doors to your employees.**

  Make sure you communicate to your employees the steps you have taken to ensure their safety.

- ☐ **If you share your office space with other tenants, ensure they are practicing safe and effective social distancing guidelines.**

  If appropriate, post any building management or local health official's notices in visible locations throughout your office.

- ☐ **Ensure your office seating is in line with social distancing guidelines, and schedule employees to be in the office accordingly.**

  In alignment with your Work From Home policy and "Return to the Office" schedule, establish proper working conditions for those employees who do come into the office. Limit the use of conference rooms if the space doesn't allow for proper social distancing.

- ☐ **Be prepared to enable social distancing and good health behavior.**

  Make sure your office is well equipped with enough hand sanitizer, masks, gloves, etc. so your employees can be as comfortable in the office as possible.

- ☐ **Develop traffic flow patterns in your office.**

  Just as many grocery stores have implemented during this crisis, consider setting up traffic flow patterns in your office. This will help to ensure employees don't "accidentally" bump into others, and will enable proper social distancing.

- ☐ **Establish guidelines for conducting group meetings.**

  This will be especially important if you will be meeting in any conference rooms. Make sure your employees understand social distancing guidelines. Consider labeling conference rooms with occupancy limits and seating arrangements that allow for social distancing.

- ☐ **Establish guidelines for any visitors entering your office.**

  Practices include frequent hand washing, use of hand sanitizers, eliminating high-touch areas, and wiping down work spaces.

- ☐ **Remind your employees of the recommended social distancing guidelines.**

  Place posters throughout your office to remind your employees to be diligent with their social distancing.

- ☐ **Communicate to your employees the steps you have taken to ensure their safety.**

  Keeping your employees informed will be absolutely critical to everyone's health and safety.

- ☐ **Create a reclosure plan.**

  Ensure you have a plan in place in the event an employee in the office shows symptoms or tests positive for COVID-19, or if officials close non-essential businesses again due to another wave in the global health crisis.

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Technology

Returning to the office doesn't necessarily mean you will be abandoning all of your Work From Home set-ups. In fact, your workforce will likely consist of remote workers for some time to come. In addition, workstations in the office may have been sitting idle while everyone worked remotely. Your technology goal is to ensure your employees have what they need to do their jobs effectively while you ensure and maintain a safe and secure work environment.

- ☐ **Evaluate any new technology deployed during the crisis.**

  The tools your employees used to work remotely may or may not be required when you return to the office. Create a list, including any new devices, and decide if they stay or go. Evaluate how the new tech was implemented, determine what worked and what fell short, and if you still need all of the licenses you purchased. Examples include new Office 365 licenses, Zoom, new laptops, etc.

- ☐ **Evaluate any service providers you use to run your business.**

  Identify any vendor that was not able to achieve their SLAs, and determine the cause. Pay particularly close attention to those critical vendors and how they performed during the crisis..

- ☐ **For any employee who will continue to Work From Home, audit the tech they will be using.**

  Determine if the tech is appropriate, secure, and is sufficient to enable optimal productivity.

- ☐ **Run an audit on any workstations in the office.**

  An audit will help you determine if the workstations are properly patched with the latest OS and other critical updates. Leverage your RMM tool to deliver the proper patches.

- ☐ **Document a list of those employees who used their personal computers to Work From Home**.

  Develop an appropriate action plan to ensure the ongoing use of personal computers or devices complies with your company's security standards. Consider requiring your employees to change the passwords on any personal devices.

- ☐ **Catalog items that were removed from the office.**

  Protect your business and intellectual property by ensuring any devices, technology, files, folders, contracts, customer lists, and documents, etc. are properly returned to the office. This list may include electronic files left on the employee's personal workstation or device.

- ☐ **Conduct a gap analysis.**

  Document the technology gaps that were exposed during the crisis and create a plan on how to address them.

- ☐ **Tell employees to stay home if they, or someone they live with feels sick or exhibits any known COVID-19 symptoms.**

  This may seem obvious, but it needs to be explained to your employees..

- ☐ **Schedule a review of your Disaster Recovery (DR) and/or Business Continuity plan.**

  What can be improved upon? What worked well? Were you able to easily transition from the office to Work From Home? How was your business impacted during this crisis? Update your DR and/or Business Continuity plan accordingly.

- ☐ **Schedule regular DR and Business Continuity testing.**

  This should be a routine part of your business. But given this recent crisis, regular DR and Business Continuity testing will be even more crucial moving forward. Don't be caught unprepared.

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Your Clients

From the perspective of returning to the of fice, once your people, your office, and your technology are in order, it's time to focus on your clients. This is where you and your team can play a critical role in help ing your clients get back to the office.

- ☐ **Schedule a review of each client's current state.**

  Expect changes to your clients' businesses. Be their trusted advisor and learn what new challenges they expect.

- ☐ **Utilize this checklist to build out your clients' office reopening plans.**

  Now that you've built out a plan for your own office return, you can be prepared to help your clients do the same. Tweak your approach based on their business and use the sections of this checklist to guide them through a successful office return.

- ☐ **Leverage your PSA.**

  Your Professional Services Automation tool can help you plan, schedule, and track your clients' "return to the office" projects.

- ☐ **Develop and conduct an After Action Review with your clients.**

  When most of us got the word to start working from home, we had little time to prepare. Use the lessons learned during this crisis to update the planning process with your clients. What did they learn? What did you learn? Document this, and prepare as this may happen again. Next time, you and your clients will not be caught off guard.

- ☐ **Plan for the future.**

  COVID-19 was a shock to most people. Work with your clients to create a plan for the next time something like this happens. Consider developing a grab-and-go approach for Work From Home, and implement it with your clients.

- ☐ **Remind your employees of the recommended social distancing guidelines.**

  Place posters throughout your office to remind your employees to be diligent with their social distancing.

- ☐ **Review the current Disaster Recovery plan with your clients.**

  Utilize lessons learned to update the plan.

This checklist is provided through our technology partner, Datto, Inc.
For additional information and assets to help you and your business through the COVID-19 crisis, please visit our dedicated resource page at escapewire.com/resources.