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## Workplace Insights

### Five Strategies for a Productive Return to the Workplace

Imagine your typical workday pre-COVID:

- Five hours of your day, you're sitting at your desk,
- Two hours of your day, you're in conference or meeting rooms, and
- One hour of your day, you're having impromptu conversations or meetings in co-workers' offices or in communal spaces.

While your particular scenario may be somewhat different, the idea that most of our days are spent at desks, offices, or conference rooms is one that the COVID pandemic has completely changed. Having worked from home for so long, where physical and mental comfort may have reigned supreme, workers coming back to the office expect changes in their workplace environments.

They want space that supports the work, but that also supports them as people.

For business owners and property managers, this means implementing ideas that will help employees get their work done AND be happy to be back in the office again. Providing amenities such as coffee bars or pool tables has been a typical go-to strategy to which employers turn. While these may be welcomed by associates, there are other more functional, tactical strategies employers should also consider, such as:

- 1. Foster less formal, less traditional workspaces.** A meeting space with three closed walls and one open side can create a less formal, more flexible environment that fosters spontaneous collaboration. Another idea: Place screens and monitors in a variety of spaces beyond just the cubicle or conference room so that employees can meet virtually with others, and/or easily conduct impromptu meetings, at their setting of choice. And speaking of that...
- 2. Offer a variety of seating options.** At home, employees were able to work at desks, or take their laptops to the couch or recliner. Employers may consider replicating this within the workplace by offering a variety of seating types. As an example, add comfortable couches in seating areas with mobile laptop tables. Be sure to consider ergonomics when

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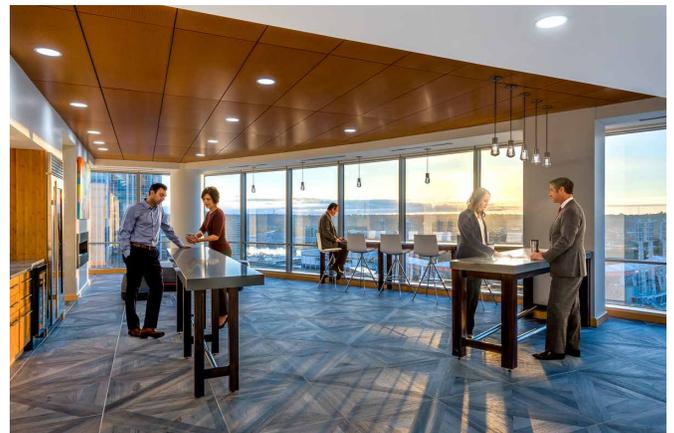
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providing new seating environments: Favorite work spots at home often are not ergonomically appropriate, but furniture solutions in the workplace absolutely must be. In addition, remember that employees regularly need privacy – which most had in abundance while working from home. Consider providing enclosed spaces with acoustic separation for private conversations.

- 3. Provide access to the outdoors, or bring in the outdoors.** Employees working from home had the opportunity to go outside on their patios or balconies for lunch or take meetings from a favorite shady spot in the yard. As employers, why not take steps to reproduce that outdoor access? Create an outdoor seating area for employees to enjoy lunch or even do their work. Indoors, consider opening up your space so that all employees, not just those with private offices, can have access to daylight or views to the outside.
- 4. De-densify the space for social distance.** Many employees, even those who have been vaccinated, may be concerned that returning to densely occupied offices could increase health risks. While it may be a bigger expense than some of the strategies above, increasing the amount of space between employee workspaces may reduce the mental stress on workers, while also increasing their protection.
- 5. Increase services.** When working from home, employees were able to have food or groceries delivered to their door. They could run out at 10 a.m. for a dry-cleaning pickup, and then again, a few hours later to pick up medicine from the pharmacy. Acknowledging that such flexibility may not translate directly to the workplace setting, employers could consider adding services that streamline their employees' lives. Adding a staffed concierge service desk to facilitate tasks such as dry-cleaning pickup and drop-off and other services could provide an incentive for employees to return to work.

Bringing employees back to the office may already be happening or may have already happened – but employees have definitely not forgotten the benefits they realized working from home. Consider the strategies above, even if your employees have fully returned to the workplace. Strategies like these will provide you with the flexibility required to support changing work processes, while making sure that employees are as focused, effective, comfortable, and productive as possible in the workplace.



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