

Give Employees More Reasons to Love Coming Back

For employees who have worked from home or remotely for two years and enjoyed a shift in workplace flexibility, encouraging a return to the office challenges the pandemic-forced new normal. Life now comes first in the work-life balance, placing the onus on employers to create return to office plans that maintain equilibrium while fostering collaboration and productivity.

By June 2022, most large employers in Philadelphia will have fully implemented their return to office plans, with many encouraging employees to integrate three days of in-person work into their schedules. According to research by Center City District, the busiest weekdays with the most pedestrian traffic since before the pandemic are Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

Following are examples of what some local businesses and corporations are doing or should consider to help employees feel ready and positive about coming back.

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Fun Surprises Go a Long Way



Sometimes it's the little things that mean the most. Expecting the unexpected – in a good way – builds morale, creates opportunities for interaction, and helps redefine the post-pandemic culture of collaborative engagement. The key is spontaneity.

- At one large employer, senior, more experienced executives work to develop relationships with younger and newer employees with an impromptu invitation to lunch or coffee.
- Order lunch for everyone one day. The employees in the office will appreciate the gesture and the ones working remotely will wish they'd been in the office that day!

Ask, Listen, Respond



This is a time of change for everyone, and things will be different than they were before the pandemic. Be mindful and respectful of the employees whose jobs required in-person work during the pandemic. Carefully consider the return to work plans of more senior employees and executive leadership to ensure and model consistent and fair expectations.

Maintain an open-door policy, provide employees with opportunities to provide anonymous, constructive feedback, and consider using surveys to learn what people want modified in terms of scheduling, office layout and more. You might be surprised how helpful your employees can be when it comes to making your office a more enjoyable place to be.

To address concerns employees may have about transportation or safety, invite SEPTA representatives to host a town hall to explain new procedures and answer questions.

Amenities Take on New Meaning Post-Pandemic



Today, the most valuable office amenities play a key role in humanizing the work experience. Spaces like work cafes, libraries, and business lounges offer informal ways for employees to benefit from mentorship, absorb the culture, and build camaraderie and social networks. The bottom line: make the extra effort it takes to dress and commute worthwhile.

- Several large employers are teaming up with SEPTA for a pilot program to offer employees free transportation to and from work.
- Others are giving employees novelties and experiences they can't get from home – a break room with enticing snacks and beverages, complimentary gym memberships, local retail and dining gift cards, reduced or subsidized parking, a roaming masseuse for 10-minute chair massages, on-site or close-by childcare – to meet them where they are right now.

Support, Connect and Engage Employees through Resource Groups



After two years of pandemic-related isolation and a lot of social and political unrest, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are helping to foster community, improve employee engagement and build company culture and brand. For employees feeling distanced by remote work, ERGs are an effective way to give them a sense of belonging, shared purpose, and support.

- During the pandemic, ERGs focused on women have shared tools for easing burdens for members suddenly facing new challenges of child-care demands while working from home.
- ERGs have also provided important feedback to help shape company policies and benefits.

Adopt a Creative, Adaptive Mindset



While the pandemic continues to create challenges, loss, and setbacks, let's not forget the silver linings. Despite the global crisis, the stretch of unbidden time early on created opportunities to reset, recalibrate and reevaluate life and work and unlocked doors to innovation and ideation. Stay flexible and open to the inevitability of change.