LaSalle Network

OFFICE
RE-ENTRY INDEX

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

LASALLE NETWORK

Throughout the extent of the Coronavirus pandemic, many companies across America halted in-office operations and transitioned workforces to operate remotely. As companies worked year-round to develop strategies for office re-entry, planning efforts continued to shift as new information was presented daily.

One year later, now with the vaccine in distribution and decreasing positivity rates, companies have a renewed focus on planning for when and how to bring employees back into the office.

In its latest "Office Re-Entry Index," LaSalle Network collected responses from **350 Chief Executive Officers, Chief Operating Officers, and Human Resources and Finance leaders** on sentiments and plans for returning to the office.

This is the first installment of an ongoing series LaSalle Network will produce over the next 12 months to continue gauging office re-entry efforts.

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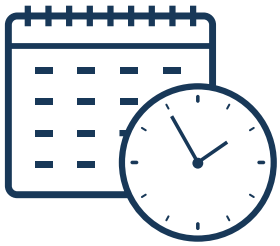
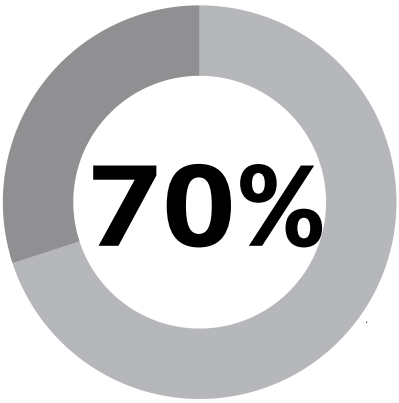
Bringing Employees

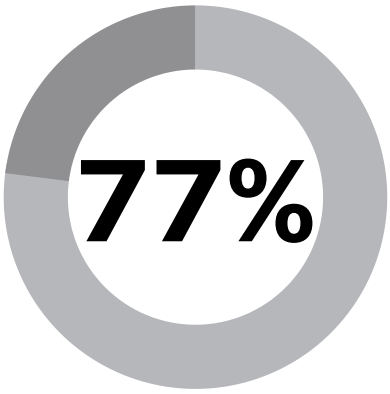
BACK INTO THE OFFICE

The majority of respondents stated they plan to have employees back in the office by **fall 2021**





of respondents reported they planned to phase employees back into the office slowly, rather than bringing them all back at once



When asked how they believe their workforce will be modeled 12 months from now with the information currently available, 77% of respondents stated it will be a **hybrid model**, with a portion of employees working in-office and a portion working from home

PHASING EMPLOYEES BACK INTO THE OFFICE

Rather than bring employees back into the office all at once, many companies have decided to phase employees back in slowly. A controlled phase-in can help prevent overwhelming the workforce as they transition back and may help mitigate potential COVID-19 outbreaks.

Here are three ways companies plan to phase employees back:

- **Strategy 1:** Start with a small percentage of the workforce on-site full time, and gradually increase the volume of on-site employees
- **Strategy 2**: Start with certain groups, teams or employees on-site specific days of the week, and other employees on-site the alternative days
- **Strategy 3**: Split teams and have some employees from each team in the office on specific days of the week, with the other team members coming into the office on the other days

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Volunteers

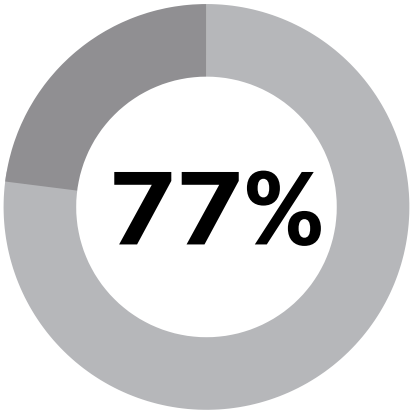
Leadership

Whole teams

A recent LaSalle Network report identified the three areas companies are considering when deciding who to bring back first, including: volunteers who feel comfortable returning to the office, company leaders, as well as bringing back whole teams that would benefit most from working in-office from a productivity and production standpoint.

Leading a

HYBRID WORKFORCE



PREDICT A FUTURE HYBRID WORKFORCE

A hybrid workforce, with both remote and on-site employees, is not a new concept; however, it is growing in popularity with more than **3/4 of survey respondents predicting they will have a hybrid workforce** this time next year

Hybrid models to consider implementing with your workforce:

- **Hybrid 1:** Entire teams remain fully remote while other teams always work on-site
- **Hybrid 2:** Certain employees per team remain remote, while the other employees of that same team work on-site
- **Hybrid 3:** Individual employees work part of the week remotely and part of the week on-site

LEADING A HYBRID WORKFORCE

There are several important elements to consider while planning for a hybrid workforce, including:

Benefits	Communication	Compensation
Customer Experience	Employee Experience	Equity
IT Infrastructure	Real Estate	Team Dynamics

LEADING A HYBRID WORKFORCE

Benefits

Consider if the company may offer different benefits and perks to those working remotely versus in-person, and how to make offerings fair and appropriate to each employees' arrangement. This may include technology allowances and/or credits for home internet services for remote workers and commuter benefits and office gym reimbursements for those on-site.

Communication

Identify and discuss with the team best practices for collaboration to ensure proper communication with every team member. This includes outlining expectations for when and how to use various communication channels. Reinforce that employees recap conversations properly to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Streamline meetings and collaboration sessions by time-blocking each discussion topic and assigning different team members to lead parts of the conversation. This can help ensure both on-site and remote employees are able to contribute evenly.

LEADING A HYBRID WORKFORCE

Communication

If not already in place, leaders should schedule regular one-on-ones, be it virtually or in-person, with each employee to talk through project statuses, feedback, and check in personally.

Ensure all employees are receiving regular company-wide communication, such as an e-newsletter or virtual town hall, to remain connected and informed. As much as it can be controlled, remote and on-site employees should receive important updates at the same time.

Compensation

According to a recent report, of companies that are hiring nationally for remote positions, 26% stated plans to base compensation on location, adjusting pay to reflect living expenses in different areas.

Customer/Client Experience

While balancing both in-person and virtual interactions with clients, clear and unified communication is critical. Create a centralized communication process to ensure hybrid teams are on the same page and able to provide seamless service and accurate information to clients.

LEADING A HYBRID WORKFORCE

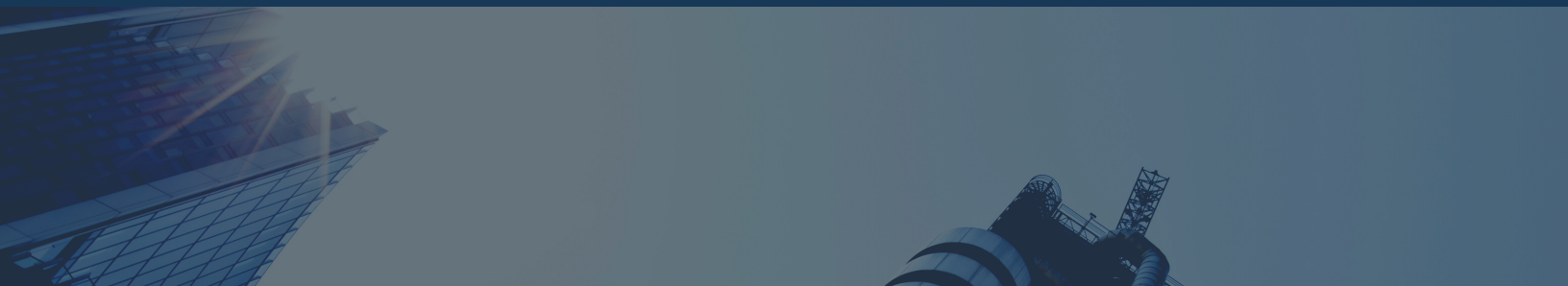
Customer/Client Experience

Consider investing in a project management system to track ongoing projects. Create a standard protocol for hybrid teams interacting with clients in which all client information is centralized and conversations are recapped to relevant team members.

Employee Experience

Hybrid workforces mean various employees will have differing experiences. In order to maintain a strong and consistent employee experience, ensure there are ample opportunities for connection, employee growth and team building for all.

To foster a sense of connection between in-person and remote employees, consider regular culture-building activities or a mentorship program for both on-site and remote workers. Consider planning quarterly virtual events for all employees, and in-person events to bring everyone together when it is safe to do so. Find ways to make certain company traditions or celebrations virtual in order to include everyone and cultivate camaraderie.



LEADING A HYBRID WORKFORCE

Equity

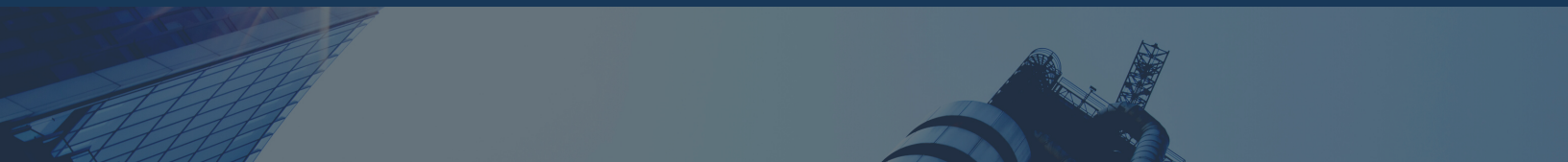
Cultivate an inclusive atmosphere where both in-person and remote employees have access to equal opportunities. Perceived favoritism for remote employees or employees working in the office may foster resentment and a disconnect between team members.

Employees who are brought on-site despite wanting to continue working from home or not feeling comfortable coming into the office may perceive remote employees as receiving favoritism. Contrarily, employees working remotely with less face time with leadership could perceive fewer opportunities for advancement and favoritism toward on-site employees. Employers should communicate clearly with all staff how they have decided who to come on-site, create standardized processes for employees to be assigned work and have their performance evaluated, and ensure equal opportunity for virtual and on-site mentorship.

IT teams must to provide a proper tech set up for those working remotely, within the office, and both. Start by assessing what technology will be returned to the office versus kept remote to ensure there are proper technology set ups available.

IT Infrastructure

Centralized file handling, such as through a cloud-based repository, is important for allowing collaboration across teams. Consider implementing additional cybersecurity tools and procedures to protect sensitive information as it is shared between various networks, and ensure all employees' devices are regularly patched and installed with the latest antimalware.



LEADING A HYBRID WORKFORCE

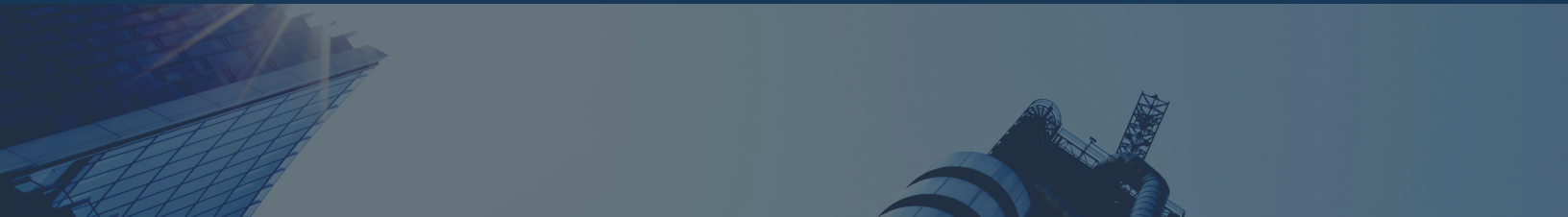
Real Estate

Consider if and how a hybrid workforce will impact real estate needs. Will a smaller office be able to handle the maximum number of employees anticipated on-site on any given day? Will there be a greater need for collaborative spaces versus cubicles?

For companies wanting to make their office a collaboration center, consider reconfiguring the office to provide more common spaces and meeting rooms that people can use while adhering to social distancing guidelines. Determine if desks or spaces will be dedicated to specific employees and teams, or if there will be flexibility for any employee to work at any desk.

Leaders should consider how hybrid-office politics will evolve, and whether there might be increased conflict based on the new structure of the workforce. They may need to be more intentional in providing timely feedback and assigning projects equally, as to not favor one group over the other.

Team Dynamics



LEADING A HYBRID WORKFORCE

Team Dynamics

Create a standardized process for all employees to be assigned new projects, have their performance evaluated, and be considered for growth opportunities.

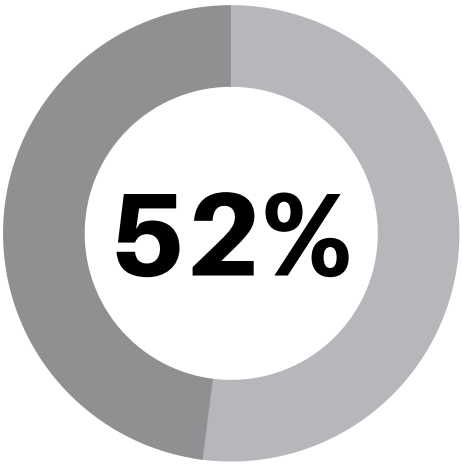
Consider also providing virtual developmental opportunities that are applicable to both those remote and those onsite to help advance their careers equally.

While employees on-site will naturally see and interact with leaders more frequently, this could cause friction for remote workers who do not get the same amount of face time. At the same time, on-site employees wanting to work from home may be envious of remote workers.

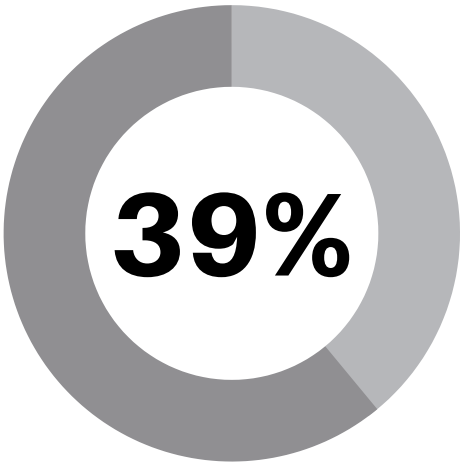
Consider additional ways to improve team dynamic, such as planning regular virtual team building activities or assigning remote and on-site employees projects to collaborate on.

Mandating

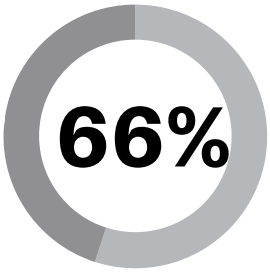
VACCINATIONS



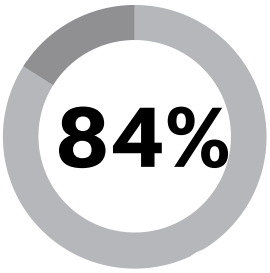
OF COMPANIES DO NOT PLAN ON MANDATING EMPLOYEE VACCINATION



OF COMPANIES ARE UNDECIDED ON MANDATING VACCINATION



HAVE NOT YET COMMUNICATED VACCINATION PLANS WITH EMPLOYEES



OF THOSE REQUIRING VACCINATION STATED THERE WAS NO EMPLOYEE RESISTANCE

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MANDATING VACCINATION

CAN EMPLOYERS REQUIRE EMPLOYEES RECEIVE A COVID-19 VACCINE?

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission(EEOC), employers can require that employees get vaccinated as a condition of going to work. However, they must be prepared to exempt employees with disabilities and religious objections. In those cases, an employer must offer a reasonable accommodation to the employee—such as working remotely or being reassigned—as long as the accommodation doesn't cause undue hardship for the employer.

CAN AN EMPLOYER TERMINATE AN EMPLOYEE WHO REFUSES TO BE VACCINATED?

In limited cases, yes. Employers will need to make reasonable accommodations to employees seeking an exemption due to disability-related reasons or religious objections and will need to follow the established reasonable accommodation process under the ADA and Title VII before taking any adverse employment actions. The employer would have to establish that an employee who is not vaccinated poses a direct threat and cannot perform their job remotely.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MANDATING VACCINATION

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE LEGAL RISKS FOR MANDATING THE COVID-19 VACCINE?

The FDA authorization for these COVID-19 vaccines is only pursuant to the Emergency Use Authorization standard—which is different than an FDA licensure of a vaccine—and therefore these vaccines have not received all of the prolonged consideration by the FDA that is typical of most common vaccinations. As a result, employers mandating the vaccine should be prepared for some resistance from employees.

An employer-mandated vaccine is considered a part of work, so under most state laws, an adverse reaction to the vaccine would be covered by workers' compensation. If an employer merely encourages employees to obtain a vaccine, coverage under workers' compensation policies may not be available.

COULD THERE BE A LIABILITY FOR NOT REQUIRING VACCINATION?

It is possible that if a mandatory vaccination policy is not imposed, employees may allege that the employer failed to provide a safe and healthy work environment as required by the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA). In this case, the employer would need to provide evidence of whether appropriate safety protocols were followed.

Stay up-to-date with city, counties and state policy regarding vaccination, in case public health authority guidance adopts the view that employers should not permit unvaccinated employees into the workplace.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR MANDATING VACCINATION

If considering mandating employees receive the vaccine, consult an attorney and consider the following questions:

- **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF MANDATING THE VACCINE?**
- **HOW WILL THE COMPANY ENFORCE THE MANDATE?**
- **HOW WILL THE COMPANY COMMUNICATE THE MANDATE WITH EMPLOYEES?**
- **HOW WILL LEADERSHIP HANDLE REFUSALS TO RECEIVE THE VACCINE?**
- **WILL CONTRACT WORKERS OR VISITORS TO THE OFFICE BE REQUIRED TO HAVE THE VACCINE, AS WELL?**

In lieu of mandating the vaccine, some employers are offering incentives for those choosing to get the vaccine. For instance, those vaccinated may be able to return to the office sooner, given a monetary incentive, or be entered into a drawing for a prize of some sort. Employers are also considering paying employees for the time they took out of their day to be vaccinated or providing on-site vaccinations if appropriate.

VACCINE INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYERS

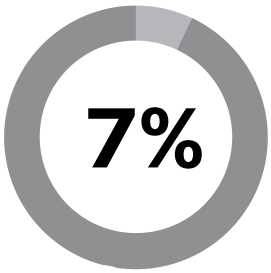
Please consult an attorney for legal recommendations regarding the COVID-19 vaccine. Below is a list of additional educational resources for employers considering mandating the vaccine.

- **MARSH & MCLENNAN WEBINAR: COVID-19 VACCINE - WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW**
- **SHRM: VACCINE: MANDATING OR NOT RESOURCE GUIDE**
- **CDC: WORKPLACE VACCINATION PROGRAM**
- **THE NATIONAL LAW REVIEW: LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS**

EDUCATING EMPLOYEES ON VACCINATIONS

Some companies have chosen to bring in outside health experts to educate staff on why, how and when they can receive the vaccine in order to increase the likelihood of employees choosing to be vaccinated on their own. In these instances, companies can also consider sharing reputable educational resources with employees through a company e-newsletter.

OF AMERICANS SAY THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE THE VACCINE



OF AMERICANS WILL ONLY GET IT IF REQUIRED

REPUTABLE RESOURCES INCLUDE:

- CDC: BENEFITS OF GETTING A COVID-19 VACCINE
- LOCAL HEALTH DEPARTMENT DIRECTORY: WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THE VACCINE BY COUNTY
- VACCINE FINDER: LOCATE AND MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO RECEIVE THE COVID-19 VACCINE
- CDC: VACCINE SAFETY LIBRARY

COMMUNICATION REGARDING VACCINATIONS

Vaccination hesitancy within the U.S. has decreased significantly, with almost 70% of Americans reporting they will or already have received the vaccine, up from 51% in September 2020. However, not all employees are on board. Many are wary of receiving the vaccine or unable to for religious or health reasons. Before communicating with employees regarding whether the vaccine will or will not be required, consider surveying the workforce to understand their sentiments and concerns regarding vaccination.

ANONYMOUS SURVEY QUESTIONS MIGHT INCLUDE:

- Have you received the COVID-19 vaccine?
- If not, do you plan to?
- Do you know how to find information regarding the vaccine, if needed?
- What, if any, concerns do you have regarding receiving the vaccine?

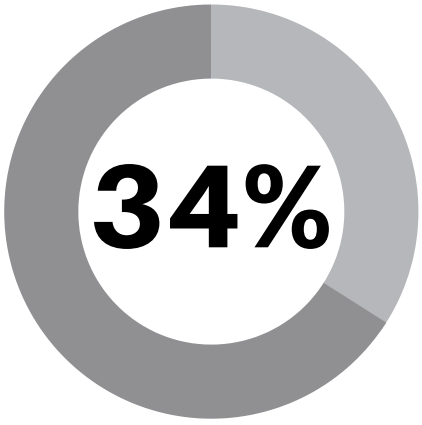
Companies wanting their workforce to get vaccinated can consider other ways to help employees feel more comfortable doing so, including hosting a Zoom Q&A session regarding the vaccine with a registered healthcare professional. Companies may also share reputable educational resources with them regarding vaccine safety, such as those included on page 19.

PLEASE CONSULT WITH YOUR EMPLOYMENT COUNSEL ON ALL OF THE INFORMATION PROVIDED.

Foreseeing
CONFLICTS

After many employees have been working from home for one year or more, some companies predict conflict between leadership and employees regarding re-entry plans, including:

- Hesitancy based on health concerns
- Familial obligations at home
- Preferring to work partially or fully remote



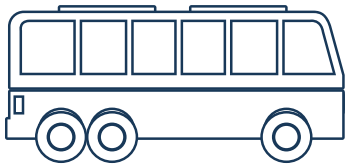
OF LEADERS PREDICT CONFLICT BETWEEN STAFF & LEADERSHIP DURING OFFICE RE-ENTRY PROCESS

TO GET AHEAD OF THESE POTENTIAL CONFLICTS, CONSIDER:

- Surveying employees on how they feel about returning to the office
- Holding focus groups to help Human Resources understand some concerns of employees
- Encourage managers to hold an open forum for employees to ask questions and voice concerns
- Ensure there is recurring and frequent company-wide communication about policies and procedures for re-entry, as well as a projected timelines

Re-Entry

OBSTACLES



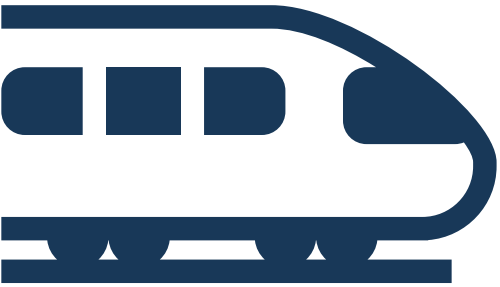
PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Of the companies that have already began office re-entry, when asked what the **top obstacle** has been, majority of respondents stated it has been **managing employees' fears surrounding commuting to work**.

CULTURAL RE-ONBOARDING

After the many changes to the market, business, office, teams and individuals' roles throughout the pandemic, employers will need to re-train managers and employees on company values and expectations. Cultural re-onboarding helps employees reacclimate to the office environment to **facilitate collaboration, communication and relationships.**

PUBLIC TRANSPORATION



To help mitigate concerns regarding commuting via public transit:

- Survey employees regarding what would make them feel safe while utilizing public transit, be it vaccination, size of crowds, cleaning procedures, etc.
- Provide educational material regarding the health procedures put into place with public transit and steps to take to remain safe. Examples include:
  - CDC tips for staying safe while traveling
  - CTA COVID-19 Info
- Consider if a flexible schedule that allows employees to commute during non-rush hours is possible

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For those uncomfortable or unable to access public transportation, consider all methods of facilitating an easier and safer commute, including:

- Arranging carpools between employees living nearby one another
- Providing stipends for employee parking to encourage the use of personal vehicles, opposed to public transport
- Providing credits or reimbursements for ride share services
- Providing credits or reimbursements for a bike share program, such as Divvy Bikes, Citi Bike or similar programs

CULTURAL RE-ONBOARDING

“Leaders are not preparing for a big challenge they will face: employees’ emotions and what that adjustment will be like. Emotionally, your employees got used to walking their dogs, seeing their kids, having dinner with their families every night, and there will be an emotional adjustment when they may not easily be able to do this when returning to the office.”

- LaSalle Network CEO, Tom Gimbel, in an interview with Forbes magazine on office re-entry planning.

Re-cultivating a sense of belonging and helping employees connect with the company culture will be important to keeping employees engaged, ramping up productivity quickly and preventing turnover. Leaders should begin to discuss re-entry expectations with employees now to allow employees time to prepare in the following ways:

- **Emotionally**: Employees not only experienced a challenging year, but their lifestyle changed, as well from routines, to who they interacted with at home and how, to care responsibilities, and the adjustment away from this can bring up varying degrees of emotion for many.
- **Mentally**: Employees will have to re-adjust to working in a different location around more people, potentially with more distractions and noise. This may present additional challenges or stressors that could impair productivity.
- **Logistically**: From daycare, to pet care, to caring for elderly parents, some employees may have additional responsibilities they will need to plan for ahead of time.

PREPARING TEAMS FOR RE-ENTRY

If they haven't already, managers should start preparing their workforce now for how their work and team will change as they return to the office or adjust to a hybrid model. This includes:

- Leading with empathy and understanding the adjustment may be especially challenging for some
- Having regular one-on-ones every two to four weeks, if possible, with staff to check in personally and understand how they are feeling in regards to returning to the office, as well as to understand what additional challenges they may be facing
- Holding regular team building events and trainings to reconnect employees with one another and strengthen camaraderie
- Training employees on transitioning back into the office, such as office procedures and protocols, team collaboration and communication expectations, increased distractions and more

For more tips on conducting effective wellness checks and communicating effectively with a hybrid workforce, download our 'Remote Manager Index' here.

ABOUT

LASALLE NETWORK

LaSalle Network is a national staffing, recruiting and culture firm with business units that specialize in accounting and finance, administrative, call center, healthcare revenue cycle, human resources, management resources, marketing, sales, supply chain, technology and executive search.

Since inception in 1998, LaSalle has worked with thousands of companies and placed more than 70,000 candidates in temporary, temporary-to-permanent and permanent positions.

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