



LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: RE-ENTRY INTO WORK

At EXCN, we are seeing that leaders are really struggling with the complex challenges of planning for and executing re-entry.

For example, in April 2020, Gail, the CEO of a large insurance company, and her executive team, made the decision that everyone in HQ could work from home during the pandemic. Now that the number of Covid-19 cases has begun to drop in their state, Gail and the executive team disagree about next steps. Joe, Paul and Alice (HR, Finance, and Legal) are reluctant to move too quickly. Steve and Jennifer (Sales & Marketing and Ops) are eager for their whole teams to return to working on-site. The executive team is asking: How do we ensure health and safety? What can we do about the mental health and burnout issues some in our workforce may be undergoing? What do we do if high potentials say they will quit if forced to come back in? How do we regain the benefits of face-to-face encounters without putting people at risk? Should we bring everybody back at once, or would staggered days be a better option? What model is best—work from home (WFH), work from anywhere (WFA), hybrid, all at the office? The team has a lot to work out before they nail down their plan.

This executive team and all of the rest of us are faced with chatter from news coverage, conversations with friends, the comedy shows we watch, and even daytime TV—it's all about re-entry back into "life." Back to work, school, sports, shopping malls, movies—back to "normalcy." Everyone is focused on how to come back.

The key considerations for successful post-pandemic re-entry are:

1. Health and safety.
2. Clear strategic connection between WFA or WFH and business outcomes.
3. Informed and inspiring leaders.

Now, more than ever, it is important to recognize the effect you as a leader are having on your team and everyone in the organization—your words, your demeanor, and your actions are all amplified to others by virtue of the power of your position. Your leadership effectiveness directly impacts the re-entry experience.

To ease re-entry, we recommend leaders focus on creating "psychological safety" and on opening the conversation so that people can speak the truth about their pandemic experiences and their current concerns. See [Leadership Effectiveness: Psychological Safety - executivecoaching.com](https://www.executivecoaching.com/leadership-effectiveness-psychological-safety). Discuss how the leader and the team can work together to ensure a positive re-entry experience. Healthy dialogue is only possible if a leader is trusted, self-aware, willing to be vulnerable, and authentic. For this to happen, leaders must be candid and inspirational.

Whatever you do, make sure you adopt a style that is best suited to your people, not the one that is most comfortable for you. Some steps you can take:

1. Ask basic and important questions like: How can we be supportive?
2. Ask how people are doing now. Ask what they need from you so that you create the environment for them to succeed.
3. Share the experiences you had. Be authentic. This will build trust.

To help with Covid-related psychological issues, leading companies – as reported in [The Washington Post](#) – are recommending that leaders acknowledge that workers are exhausted and burned out, and provide some time off to recognize the additional stress workers have been under. Check out the article for some great ideas.

How can you lead re-entry with psychological safety? What is your communication plan for opening re-entry discussions?

Further reading

- [Help Your Employees Manage Their Reentry Anxiety \(hbr.org\)](#)
- [How to Re-Onboard Employees Who Started Remotely \(hbr.org\)](#)
- [Getting hybrid work right-What employees are saying \(Mckinsey.com\)](#)
- [14 Ways To Help Employees Feel Safe Returning To In-Person Work \(forbes.com\)](#)