

Manager Tips for Returning to Work

Tip 1

As managers begin to welcome employees back to campus under our current status, please remember to that your ability to take care of yourselves is critical to the health and safety of your team. What does that mean?

1. Now is a time for all managers to work with their staff to outline what mutual respect, compassion and kindness looks like. Most employees are craving interactions and have a wide range of expectations of themselves, their coworkers, their managers and the university. So, here are some ideas that might be something to consider but also realize there are resources available to provide consultation.

- A. Remember the importance of your own sleep, nutrition, personal stress levels as you help your team transition to your emerging work requirements. The old advice of “take care of yourself before you take care of others” is an important mantra. If you need assistance in defining ways to take care of yourself, remember that EAP is available for confidential in-the-moment assistance.



- B. Before staff return to campus or as soon as reasonably possible, talk to them about what the expectations will be in the work setting, what precautions have been taken, and what they will be expected to do to help keep their workplace safe. Ask staff what concerns they have and any solutions they would like to share to help address these concerns. As part of a team meeting, ask staff to agree on office etiquette and safety procedures as they return to campus. Encourage your team to work together to find compromise and to be flexible as each team member may have had a different experience throughout this time. One tool you may consider using to guide this conversation is standard operating procedures. Please find a [template here](#).



- C. Meet with each staff as they return to campus to ask how they are doing, share your expectations for kindness, mutual respect and that if anyone is struggling you can provide the EAP phone number or website (713-500-3327; <https://inside.uth.edu/eap/employee-assistance/>). Here are some suggestions of ways to open up the conversation:

“Tell me about how you are feeling with (back to campus, working different schedules, being back with your workgroup, etc.). Do you have any concerns or questions that you want to share with me? How will I know that you are having a difficult time? How will I know that you are thriving?”



Listen to any fears or excitement or change in affect or demeanor from their usual behavior. Share that you are available to assist; we must all be respectful of others; and that if they have any safety concerns or concerns about how their co-workers are following any safety measures to bring those issues up to you or another departmental leader to address.

Continue the dialogue by having frequent touch base conversations with your staff to check in and see how things are going.

Tip 2

Fear, anxiety, guilt, as well as personal situations can impact on any one of us without even realizing it. It affects our ability to be our best selves because all of our energy is spent on “just making it through the next day or situation.” This can show up at the workplace whether it is with co-workers, visitors or even our patients. It will not be unusual if staff share their opinions or perspective with others. Although it may seem benign, office talk can quickly turn to gossip or resentments. As a manager, when you begin to feel the conversations are no longer appropriate or collaborative, have the conversation sooner than later especially if this is a new type of response for certain employees. Be curious before being judgmental. Here are some examples of ways to approach this situation:

“I want to share my concern over something I just heard. Can you tell me more, from your perspective, about this incident?”

“Tell me about you. What is going on? “

“Let’s take a minute to talk about what just happened. This is not like you.”

“Tell me about what prompted your response/behavior/conversation/decision?
How can I help?”

Based on that information, you can then offer feedback, set expectations or give resources for the employee to be able to find better ways to cope. Life events happen to all of us and compassionate concern can guide the next step and/or conversation.



Tip 3

Returning to the workplace or changing job expectations can also create stress in employee’s personal lives or your employee’s personal stressors can become evident at work. Financial issues, child care,



elder care, new job assignments, uncertainty are everyday stressors but the employee’s response to these events may be more extreme. Managers can use different times during the work day to remind employees about the number of resources available through the EAP and Wellness services. Here are some suggestions that others have used:

- a. In the break room or conference rooms, have a poster with the EAP phone number and website
- b. In a weekly meeting or phone call, discuss one resource that the EAP/Wellness offers as a way to “normalize” getting help.

- c. Managers can ask the EAP for brochures of wallet cards available at their desk to hand out to employees if the employee shares a particular concern (loneliness, sadness, childcare concerns, relationship issues, feeling isolated from friends, financial issues, etc.).
- d. Begin or end the day with a 3-5-minute mindfulness exercise for the entire team. It is a good way to focus on the upcoming tasks or letting go of the stress as the employee ends the day. At first it can be awkward, but this shows that the manager is committed to the overall well-being of the employees. You may also want to get employees involved in ways to lead these types of mindfulness moments. (EAP has some examples of scripts to provide managers, if you want this tool).

Employee Assistance Programs



713 - 500 - 3327



go.uth.edu/eap

Tip 4

Performance issues still need to be addressed. However, consider beginning the conversations with the compassion and recognition that times may be different.

- a. “I would like to discuss some expectations that we have discussed before and how these will continue to be your focus over the next (weeks, months, days, etc.). Are there any barriers to your success that we might need to discuss?”



Connect with an Employee Relations Advisor for further advice and guidance on handling performance issues. Employee Relations can be reached at 713-500-3180.

Tip 5

If you have employees who received an accommodation to telework, please reach out to Equal Opportunity & Diversity at call@uth.tmc.edu or 713-500-CALL before approaching these employees about returning to campus.



Similarly, for employees who were granted Family Medical Leave due to a health condition or the health condition of a family member, please reach out to your departmental Family Medical Leave Coordinator and Employee Relations (713-500-3180) before approaching these employees about returning to campus.