Getting Your Team Ready for the Hybrid Office

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In all the years I've been a remote-work advocate, there's one thing I've consistently noticed when talking to remote workers: They almost never want to go back to the office. Recent studies have also shown that only 12% of employees are willing to work full-time from an office in the future.

Though it comes with its own challenges, it's clear that implementing a hybrid workplace will be essential. It also requires a solid plan for getting your team on board before you decide to go back to the office, even if just for a couple of days per week.

Here are five ways of preparing your team for the switch.

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1. Provide guarantees for a safe work environment

Physical safety and stable mental health are the chief priorities for most employees. Health hazards represent the primary difference between the office as we once knew it and the future of the workplace. So going back to the office naturally raises concerns.

But employees are well aware of these issues by now. Many of

them were seriously concerned even before 2020 whenever the flu season was around the corner. A line can be drawn between a top employer who acknowledges employees as the company’s number-one asset and one whose priorities are elsewhere.

Put together a realistic plan to tackle in-office health, including:

- Rethinking office paths.
- Adding more space between desks.
- Periodically running health check-ups on your staff.
- Implementinging a strict room-booking system to prevent overcrowding.
- Having people come into the office at different times of day.
- Keeping routine meetings via video calls.

Present this plan to your employees before you ask them to return to the office so they can be aware of the new changes and suggest potential improvements.

2. Place the individual at the center of your business

Remote work has been challenging enough in the pandemic. In a hybrid setting, these obstacles will only accumulate. Within a hybrid workplace, every individual is likely to struggle with making the schedule work for them. As work keeps switching between the office and their screens at home, they might lose focus and motivation.

This can put a halt on their professional-development goals, leaving them feeling like they haven’t achieved everything

they wanted at the end of the year. Giving everyone the freedom to craft a schedule that suits their needs can prove a first good step to take in this regard.

Similarly, the issue of loneliness when working from home will persist for people who still haven’t adapted. Imposing a strict policy as to when people should come to the office won’t work for everyone. The few people who are feeling constricted or find it hard to focus at home will be better off with flexible choices that let them work from the office with their colleagues, even if just on a rotational basis.

To find all hidden problems, talk to your team – to every single person. Anonymous employee-feedback surveys or polls are appropriate approaches to receive the details of sensitive issues they wouldn’t want to otherwise disclose.

3. Ask employees for feedback before making any change

The pre-remote-work era was largely dependent on leadership decisions. Employee feedback was something not all organizations took seriously. Even when they did, surveys were sent too rarely. But working remotely highlighted the importance of listening to employees and meeting their demands. In turn, managers have gained relevant insights into how they could improve employee satisfaction, simply by talking to the people in their company.

Making a change within the hybrid office can always have a severely negative impact. Get everyone to come into the office and you might end up with half of your team sick. Force them to show up at strict office hours and you’ll lose them as they leave for more understanding employers.

Before you decide on anything, discuss it with everyone. Schedules, work processes, tools, concerns, team

collaboration and independent wishes are all aspects to bring up before returning to your office.

4. Paving the way for new restrictions

Regardless of how strong your hybrid-workplace plans are, new restrictions are bound to appear, so don’t rely only on your office for specific project tasks. Make sure that everything you’re planning to handle in the office can be done at home too. Prepare a list of policies or guidelines, and don’t ditch a tool that might turn out to be your best on-project communication pathway.

Keep your team culture in mind at this point. Have a list of team-building activities your employees can bond over using video calls in case of a new lockdown. This is also the perfect time to tap into a global talent pool and start hiring non-locally. Bonus points for diversity right so you can benefit from fresh talent and new cultures.

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5. Prioritize transparency and trust

Keep everyone in the loop. Have a document anyone can access to see your roadmap to the hybrid office. Be fully honest when it comes to not being able to do something. If you can’t promise everyone will enjoy using a new collaboration app, let them know. The same goes for any time you need to reduce costs or prepare for a low-sales season.

8Nearly 90% of employees expect CEOs to speak out publicly regarding any new societal or local issues. Displaying trust

and interest in keeping your employees safe gives them the mental security they need to worry less about what’s to come. Transparency is the keyword to hold on to as you’re preparing your team to join a hybrid workplace. Forget that, and you’re bound to see a sudden drop in your employee retention rates.

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