RETURN TO WORK STANDARDS
Created by the Workplace Wellbeing Initiative

Initiative Members: John Toomey (Chair), Danielle Posa (Vice Chair), Gloria Treister, Elizabeth Bachrad, Sarah Gravely, Nuz Chagan, Talya Landau

The purpose of the Return To Work (RTW) standards is to help organizations take a strategic and well-thought-out approach to the transition back to the office that takes into account the ways in which the fundamental "nature of work" has changed. While it was an upheaval for us all to embrace remote work in early 2020, there have been some unanticipated 'quality of life' benefits from the flexibility that came from remote work that has contributed to employees' well-being - and these benefits should be retained. It is our intention that these standards be seen as guidelines that can be fluid and adaptable for the optimum RTW policies and procedures that suit each organization based on their space, employee needs, work requirements, environment, and bottom line.

**Note: At the end of this document you will find a curated list of articles and resources that will provide you with additional information on this subject of returning to work.

Criteria	The Standard	*Additional Details*
Leaders should champion all initiatives	Executive leadership advocates and communicates all initiatives/actions mentioned below.	*Leaders should champion all the initiatives by going out of their way to demonstrate their genuine commitment to people's safety, comfortability in the transition, and overall wellbeing.*
Deploy an ongoing survey	Deploy a Return-to-Work survey before and after employees return to an office environment in order to assess their needs ahead of time, and then assess how it's going once the transition has been made.	*Use this survey to ask the right questions about how people are feeling about the transition and to gauge their overall wellbeing (do this monthly).*
Develop a RTW Value Proposition	Develop a value proposition that conveys the advantages and benefits of returning to work.	*Ask yourself, how can you get people to want to work on-site? What does your workplace offer that enhances the employee experience? This helps answer the question of "why do I really need to go back?" Explain how there are benefits to both remote and in-person work and what they are. And make sure you've first educated yourself on the*

		differences.
Safety Education	Provide required (but engaging and interactive) training about how to maintain health safety getting to, and while at work.	*Enable employees to ask questions and have their concerns heard. Have a way of tracking attendance to ensure all employees have attended. Consider offering this education at multiple designated times.*
Create clear safety policies and expectations	Summarize safety education into a set of written policies and expectations.	*Ensure that these policies and expectations are distributed to the organization, enforced by managers, and can be easily accessed for review. Publicly amplify, support, and implement recommendations from credible scientific sources. Make sure to include/explicitly state the physical elements of the office space.*
Optimize re-entry & new hire onboarding	Develop a re-entry plan for the initial first days that help make employees feel comfortable and excited to be in the office together.	*Communication and connection are critical, make the first day(s) count, welcome new teammates to the community, don't rely on old communication norms.*
Create structured wellbeing check-ins between employee and manager	Have psychologically safe discussions or "wellbeing check-ins" around COVID concerns, RTW concerns, work-life balance issues, and anything non-work related that employees need to discuss.	*Provide a meeting template for managers to ask the "important" questions regarding their transition to the office and how they're feeling. DO NOT assume they know what to say or ask.*
Address commute related stress	Ensure that managers are equipped to specifically address concerns around commuting to work - prior to the actual RTW date to ensure these concerns are addressed.	*Encourage, when possible, flexible working schedules to avoid commute related stress. Consider covering commuting costs for employees to help ease the burden.*
Actively include remote workers in meetings	Ensure remote workers feel included in communications, and meetings by asking them for their opinions on the matters being discussed (especially during hybrid meetings.)	*Test the hybrid format, and encourage experimentation with meeting types (physical, virtual, walking). Specifically ask employees how they would like to be included. Encourage them to show their face on video - because their opinion matters NOT because you want to make sure they're paying attention.*
Remove any underlying/unspoken pressure to come into the office	Ensure people do not feel any underlying, unspoken pressure to come into the office through leadership communication which is then explicitly followed up on by every	*Provide guidelines to managers around how to have these conversations. Perhaps enable employees to communicate their concerns anonymously.*

	manager.	
Equip employees with proper tools & technology.	Make sure employees have the tools, technology, and resources they need inside and outside of the office.	*Provide easily accessible resources and communication channels, clarify how communication will work for remote workers, use tech that aligns teams.*
Encourage social interaction to foster communication and bonding amongst employees	Provide ways for employees to engage socially in easy ways (during working hours).	*Many employees cannot engage in social activities due to familial obligations, or they feel they can spend the time more productively doing something else. Embed social time into the work-day through company sponsored lunches - or happy/hour meetings that take place before 6pm. Get creative.*
Provide managers with support and training	Support and empower your managers through proper check-ins and robust management training.	*Managers are the glue of your RTW strategy. Make sure they are fully supported and appreciated. Equip them with proper training, and ensure that someone is checking in with them to make sure they feel empowered/supported to deliver on any "additional asks" pertaining to the RTW strategy. Sufficient Manager training should address wellbeing topics, general management topics, as well as DEI. (Example: Gallup manager training)*
Make structural workflow changes or adaptations	Grant permission for individuals, teams, and managers to craft the right plan for productive hybrid or in-person work, and acknowledge that one size doesn't fit all.	*Reassign or reframe duties and workflows as necessary; Rethink and rewrite job descriptions; Create clear processes to plan, organize, and prioritize workloads and tasks, whether in the office or at home*
Clarify working hours	Create clear (written) expectations around working hours that help employees know when they can disconnect. Encourage leaders at all levels to respect these hours and reduce communication during non-working hours/weekends.	*Burnout is partially a function of a lack of boundaries between work and life. That boundary has to be explicitly stated and formalized by leadership in order for employees to feel they truly have permission to END their work day and spend time on other things that energize them.*

Physical preparedness (and other job-specific considerations)	For employees doing physical/hard labor, make sure they are physically ready to work again.	*Make sure your employees are fit to do the physical demands of their job. Think through the specific aspects of the nature of your employees' work to make sure you are considering any potential challenges they may face upon their return.*

Recommended Articles & Resources for Returning to Work

ARTICLES

From Gallup

[Top CHROs Believe 'Flexibility Within a Framework' Is the Future of Work](#)

[Reboard Your Workforce With Your Culture in Mind](#)

[Measure Performance: Strategies for Remote and Hybrid Teams](#)

[Seven in 10 U.S. White-Collar Workers Still Working Remotely](#)

[Going Back to Work in the Office: It Has to Be Worth It](#)

From Other Sources

[2021 Return to Work Survey](#) (Deloitte)

[The New Future of Work](#) (Microsoft)

[The new frontiers of hybrid work take shape](#) (Financial times)

[Will workers return to the office?](#) (The Economist)

[What Psychological Safety Looks Like in a Hybrid Workplace](#) (HBR)

These RTW standards are part of a larger set of standards our initiative is putting together on various topics of workplace wellbeing to help you better understand this complex subject, and take action around the topics that matter.

[Why You're So Anxious About Going Back to the Office](#) (HBR)

[Returning to the Office Sparks Anxiety and Dread for Some](#) (NYTimes)

[Back to work: 6 steps to a mentally healthy transition.](#) (Unmind)

[Shaping the Workplace of the Future: 5 Key Considerations](#) (Diligent Insights)

QUESTIONS + COMMENTS + SUGGESTIONS + FEEDBACK?

This is a working document, which we will adapt and improve upon feedback. To provide feedback, questions, or if you have a suggestion, best practice or specific recommendation please feel free to reach out to [John Toomey](#) (Chair) or [Danielle Posa](#) (Vice Chair) directly.

If you would like to DISCUSS this content with other members of the GWI Workplace Wellbeing Community - Please join our [Linkedin Group](#).

These RTW standards are part of a larger set of standards our initiative is putting together on various topics of workplace wellbeing to help you better understand this complex subject, and take action around the topics that matter.