

Back-to-Work Checklist for Organizations

A guide for returning to work in the era of COVID-19



This guidebook and checklist have been prepared by The Luminous Group LLC in W. Bloomfield, Michigan. It may be used to help you prepare your organization's COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan. This guidebook and checklist were developed via team collaboration and benchmarking to the best of our abilities as of the publication date. We'd be glad to field any questions you may have or guide you to additional resources.

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Disclaimer:

The document is made available to you for informational purposes only and should not be construed as legal, financial, safety, or medical advice. To obtain the most current guidelines for health and safety related to COVID-19, please refer to the Centers for Disease Control, the Federal Government, and your state and local authorities.

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Executive Summary

- Returning to work during or after a pandemic is NOT 'back to normal'.
- Top leadership's primary concern should be taking care of people – both their physical workspace and their emotional return.
- For physical safety back at work, all employees must adhere to sound social distancing practices, additional PPE, and cleanliness measures.
- Back at work, people will continue to have personal issues pulling on them, such as children not in school, family who are high-risk, or even mourning the loss of a loved one or dear friend.
- Every organization will have a unique process for restarting and going back to work, depending upon their processes, geography, needs of employees, as well as other factors.
- The following is meant to be a guide for your back-to-work committee to consider.
- Due to the extent of risks, consider the breadth of your back-to-work committee, e.g. cross-functional participation and even professional medical advice that's not typically in-house.
- If you're not receiving this in an editable document format, please contact us to send you the Word document, for ease of your own customization.
- If you'd benefit from an app to allow employees to self-assess daily before coming to work, and to track and record restart checklist actions that protect your employees and customers, ask us for information about our COVID-19 Restart Management app.
- If you have questions regarding establishing a back-to-work committee, planning and oversight, or guidance on specific recommendations, we'd be glad to help. We can be reached at Results@LuminousGroup.com or 248.538.8677.

About The Luminous Group:

The Luminous Group is a process improvement and problem-solving consulting firm helping manufacturing, service, non-profit and other industry clients in Michigan and beyond. Our services include work team facilitation, management and team coaching, delivery of training in topics related to process excellence and project management. Since 1999, The Luminous Group has helped hundreds of client companies improve quality and productivity metrics and reduce costs.

Message for the Top Leadership Team

PEOPLE FIRST!!

As we transition from stay-at-home orders back to the workplace, taking care of people should be the organization's primary concern. Leaders should recognize that it is not only a physical return – it also is a psychological return. Both of these priorities must be addressed.

At this time, the primary role of leadership is two-fold: 1) you must provide assurance and leadership to the workforce to smooth the transition back to work, while also 2) ensuring new policies, rules, and regulations are being established and enforced at all levels of the organization.

Top leadership needs to set the direction, assign resources, and define responsibilities to prepare the workplace for returning to work. The checklists in the next section will help with suggested actions needed, arranged by area of general responsibility.

Returning to work is not returning to normal; things have changed. We need to first recognize there are many stressors your employees may have experienced during stay-at-home orders including:

- Their own illness
- Mourning the loss of family or friends
- Practicing social distancing (while also missing the ability to hug family and friends)
- Hygiene issues such as more frequent hand washing, covering their faces, etc.
- Fear of an invisible virus, including accidental (or inadvertent) exposure by others
- Changing work priorities and assignments
- Children at home who are normally at school or in childcare
- Social isolation

Going back to work with a pandemic is something very new. It is clear that returning to work is not going back to 'normal'. Employees need to hear from their leadership and see evidence that their safety is the top priority.

PIVOTING THE WORKFORCE BACK TO WORK

After being told to be socially distant for many weeks, people will be apprehensive / fearful of returning to work and being in close proximity to others. After getting in the habit of keeping a safe six-foot distance, it can be unnerving to be physically close at work. They may have trust issues and questions about work expectations. As a result, neuroscience tells us that many workers – including managers – may be in a fight, flight, or flock mode.

Given this, companies and their leaders should approach the return to work not as normal business as usual, but rather as something that is new. Workers still have their technical skills and knowledge, but their social interaction skills must be “reawakened” and possibly “reeducated.” We must recognize that it will take time - weeks more than days - for employees to adjust to a “new normal” – whatever that is.

Returning to work will require a great deal of communication:

Prior to employees returning to the workplace, communications will need to address specific issues related to the logistics of the work site.

- Efforts to ensure a safe work environment - under OSHA employers have a duty to provide a safe workplace:
 - New safety protocols
 - Workstation design and safe distancing
 - Workstation disinfecting protocols – upon return to work, ongoing, etc.
 - Testing availability
 - Policies re: wearing PPE – with other workers / customers
 - Will PPE be provided?
- First day of work agenda, particularly announcing a meeting with leadership
- Where to address questions and concerns:
 - Safety
 - Specific work responsibilities

On the first day of the return to work, it is important to begin the workday with a clear message from top leadership. This may take the form of in-person meetings or video chats depending on the number and geography of worksites.

- Leaders at all levels must be accessible and transparent
- Begin with conversations about stay-at-home experiences to build trust
 - Share memories, challenges, funny stories etc. about the work-from-home period
 - If feasible, employees should be invited to share concerns or questions about returning to work
 - LISTEN – understand and respond
 - Leaders should share their stories as well
- Thank them for their work efforts from home – Celebrate their efforts
- Present the company’s financial stability, future prospects, plans, and vision
- Review any significant changes in policies / procedures as a result of COVID-19

On an ongoing basis, employees will need a way to express physical and psychological concerns that arise as they begin working onsite. These can be addressed through periodic town halls or one-on-one employee counseling (similar to an Employee Assistance Program). Items to share may include:

- Home issues employees may be dealing with:
 - Childcare needs if schools / childcares are still closed
 - Assisting family members who are at-risk
- Psychological issues:
 - Were or are any family members infected; did any family or friends die?
 - Fear of being infected
 - Be on the look-out for negative workplace behaviors such as:
 - Shaming or discriminating against other employees based on their level of fear or lack of fear;
 - “Turning people in” for risky behavior;
 - Evaluating whether others should be at work due to perceived symptoms
- Review existing and new company policies given the pandemic:
 - Are work-at-home policies available for employees who have responsibilities for children out of school with no childcare or caring for at-risk family members?
 - Changes in sick day policies, especially policies about coming to work sick
 - Replace handshaking with new ‘greetings’ such as fist or elbow bumping, use of hand sanitizers, etc.
 - Changes in health care coverage
- Any lessons learned from work-at-home that can be applied to the workplace and future emergency and/or pandemic situations

PREPARING THE WORKPLACE

The following section of this document addresses the second priority of leadership – ensuring new policies, rules, and regulations are being established and enforced at all levels of the organization. It is designed as a series of checklists for various departments who have a critical role in ensuring safe start-up and return-to-work activities.

As a leader, it is your responsibility to assign a point person (or persons) to oversee the granular details of carrying out these activities. Furthermore, it is critical for top management to ensure those individuals have necessary resources, roadblocks are removed and, finally, verify these activities have been completed. Where appropriate, ongoing verification will be necessary.

This is not an all-inclusive checklist but is instead provided for informational purposes. It is a starting point for any organization to consider how to transition back to work in the era of the COVID-19 virus.

Checklists for Back-to-Work

1) Workplace Safety

Owner: _____

- Gather all CDC and governmental requirements and guidelines for workplace safety; including physical distancing and hygiene.
- Evaluate which employees should return and when, and which employees should continue to (temporarily?) work from home (e.g. at-risk individuals, non-essential at the workplace, caretakers for at-risk individuals, etc.).
- Develop, communicate, and deploy a return-to-work policy for any employee who had laboratory confirmed COVID-19.
- Make it safe for every employee to express their concerns and fears; for example, by establishing a department or resource for one-on-one employee counseling sessions for issues related to COVID-19.
- Restrict the number of employees on-premise to no more than is necessary and promote remote work to the extent possible.
- Restrict the number of employees in confined spaces, such as elevators and meeting rooms.
- Keep people at least six feet from each other to the extent possible.
- Control workplace entry points and develop access procedures to monitor for health issues and to maintain physical distancing.
- Provide approved hand sanitizer dispensers at key locations, including building entryways.
- Consider special care for high-risk individuals.
- Further develop how to engage and support employees who will continue (temporarily?) to work from home.
- Develop and plan training for all employees for at work and at home safety related to the current situation.
- Schedule a cleaning company to disinfect all buildings and work areas.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces (doorknobs, desks, keyboards, machines, tools, physical files, etc.).
- Institute and publish protocols and checklists for on-going cleaning and disinfecting.
- Establish new policies for food storage and eating at the workplace; with input from impacted employees.
- Consider assignment of non-overlapping work teams to prevent any potential cross-team exposure or infection.
- Develop policies and procedures for prompt identification and isolation of ill employees (fever, excessive coughing, shortness of breath, etc.).
- Deploy and implement protocols to ensure that only healthy employees enter the workplace (in-bound check for fever, coughing, other illness signs).

- Institute washing of hands and surfaces when entering and leaving work.
- Update organizational guiding principles and related messages to include needs for the current situation.
- Ensure availability and use of PPE (face masks, gloves – non-allergenic, etc.).
- Communicate and educate employees on the above and continually reinforce (town halls, emails, newsletters, team meetings, company portal, etc.).

2) Board of Directors and Advisory Board

Owner: _____

- Creation and approval of any new or modified policies.
- Benchmarking of best practices related to the current situation.
- Contingency planning for future disruptions and risks.
- Public companies - defend against unsolicited take overs.
- Review financial forecasts and cashflow planning.
- Review loan payback status and loan covenants.
- Oversee communication with owners and shareholders.
- Ensure that applications for relevant new federal and state loan and tax incentives are completed.

3) All Department Heads

Owner: _____

- How and when will your employees return to work?
- Will employees have limited or new roles/responsibilities, especially in the first weeks back?
- Provide a new hire orientation for staff added just before or during the shutdown.
- Review all communications for their appropriateness and relevance based on the current state of affairs.

4) Top Management

Owner: _____

- Update or develop contingency plans for outbreak of viral infections, storms, energy outages, and other high severity workplace risks.
- Initiate strategic planning including new SWOT analysis to adjust the business model to best fit strengths and opportunities, e.g. new markets, new products, new pricing, etc.
- Evaluate all new federal and state loan and tax laws have been applied for or executed (CARES Act, EIDL Loans, etc.).

- Consider outreach to community social services and health organizations who are on the front-line of the COVID-19 relief effort, e.g. monetary contributions, donating supplies, and volunteering opportunities.

5) Human Resources Function

Owner: _____

- Attend to all checklist items under the “Workplace Safety” header above.
- Monitor employees and customers for COVID-19 symptoms with a strict reaction policy.
- Monitor local, state, and federal trends in COVID-19 cases diagnosis trends and have a preparedness plan for various infection points.
- Consider establishing as-needed employee counseling resources to specifically address concerns about COVID-19 (e.g. EAP or other professionals).
- Update policies and procedures to address any additions or revisions to benefits (e.g. guidelines around use of sick days, coming to work sick, work-at-home policies, use of vacation / personal time, FMLA, etc.).
- Post new state and/or federal guidelines as required by law.
- Conduct new employee orientations for employees who were added during or after the pandemic.
- Update employee manual with items specific to the COVID-19 pandemic, storms, or other significant workplace impacts.
- Review EEO, ADA, OSHA, NLRA and Wage and Hour compliance requirements and changes due to the COVID-19 situation. Educate managers and employees where changed may benefit or restrict them.

6) Sales & Marketing Function

Owner: _____

- Attend to all checklist items under the “Workplace Safety” header above.
- Review customer communications for their appropriateness and relevance based on the current state of affairs.
- Update company website home page to include anticipated and final start-up information and associated news.
- Place exterior signage to keep customers safe and informed.
- Email to customers and prospects with changes that impact them and status updates. Include new customers from online sales during the physical shutdown.
- Promote information and news on social media.
- Update Google My Business profile with current 'open' days and business hours.

7) Engineering Function

Owner: _____

- Attend to all checklist items under the “Workplace Safety” header above.
- Determine if the pandemic has created, diminished, or destroyed the value of products and how this can be addressed.
- Establish new work instructions and work site designs that consider best safety practices for employees.
- Determine if new technologies are available to mitigate risks (automatic handwashers, transfer equipment to minimize person to person exposure, etc.).

8) Maintenance and Facilities Functions

Owner: _____

- Attend to all checklist items under the “Workplace Safety” header above.
- Establish new protocols or reinforce existing cleaning protocols.
- Investigate how a known contaminated site will be cleaned and approved for return to work.
- Consider labeling workspaces, room, machines, equipment, furniture, etc. with green labels indicating ‘Sanitized’ and the date verified.
- Validate or reconfigure work cells to ensure adequate distancing of employees and minimal handling of parts, containers, tools, etc..
- Verify planned maintenance tasks are not past-due, and any exceptions are prioritized for completion based on production risk.

9) Operations and Logistics Functions

Owner: _____

- Attend to all checklist items under the “Workplace Safety” header above.
- Verify that operators are certified (or re-certified) to perform their assigned job.
- Consider having employees review key procedures and work instructions to ensure key steps are not forgotten or missed.
- Ensure work cells are clear of expired, unmarked, foreign, and suspect parts and supplies.
- Inspect all on-site materials and clearly label as conforming, suspect, or non-conforming (e.g.: raw materials, work-in-process (WIP) and finished goods).
- Update scheduling, warehouse, and logistics activities with material counts and status so that they can plan production accordingly.
- Segregate all suspect or non-conforming materials for disposition.

- To minimize risk, perform trial production runs and certify both key process elements and all relevant product characteristics.
- Increase supervisory and management process verifications to ensure standards and instruction are being followed (e.g., Layered Process Audits).
- Conduct safety audits for both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 actions to remind everyone that all safety items require continual adherence and diligence.

10) Quality Function

Owner: _____

- Attend to all checklist items under the “Workplace Safety” header above.
- Develop methods to confirm workplace and product cleanliness.
- Update control plans and work instructions to include supervisory confirmation of cleaning.
- Collect health check and infection cases found data and present to management.
- Implement re-start product containment procedures to validate that processes are meeting all customers critical requirements.

11) Procurement / Supplier Quality Function

Owner: _____

- Attend to all checklist items under the “Workplace Safety” header above.
- Notification of startup timeline.
- Notification of demand forecast and initial new orders.
- Ensure payments to suppliers are current or create a plan to get current.
- Key suppliers should re-certify that their process is in control and fully operational.
- If a supplier changes a process or substitutes materials/components, request and review evidence that the result does not impact your requirements or those of your customers.

12) Finance & Accounting Function

Owner: _____

- Attend to all checklist items under the “Workplace Safety” header above.
- Conduct a business impact analysis to re-size financial plans to match the current reality and best assumptions.
- Model alternative financial scenarios for the next 12 months.
- Increase frequency of monitoring Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and cashflow events, including payroll and payables forecasts.

- Consider actions to maximize available cash and open credit lines, including exploring available COVID-19 inspired loan programs.

13) Lessons Learned

Owner: _____

Assess what worked well during shutdown/slowdown; and what aspects should be halted, and which continued.

- Virtual meetings or online training when they are as or more effective than in person.
- Online storefronts when they are cost-effective and beneficial to customers (or new customers).
- Review new processes that have been defined or developed to determine if they can be better defined or improved.
- Capture lessons learned and build them into departmental and organizational contingency plans. Consider: employee safety, customer care, quick shut-down, working from home, restart, and other aspects.

14) Improve Contingency Planning for Future Problems

Owner: _____

To better prepare for future significant business disruptions, evaluate what went well and what could be done better regarding your organization's contingency planning:

- The existence and content of your organization's Preparedness and Response Plan and other Contingency Plans.
- Assignment of responsibilities and authority of a crisis management team.
- Crisis management team training.
- Periodic practice of those contingency plans.
- Availability and effectiveness of emergency situation communication tools, e.g. email, text, social media.
- Warehousing or early procurement of emergency supplies to protect health (e.g. thermometers, hand sanitizer, antibacterial cleaning solutions, surface wipes, masks, gloves, etc.).
- Timely receipt of communications from the CDC, World Health Organization, federal and local governments, and from your organization's headquarters and top leadership and processing of that information.
- Speed and accuracy of initial and on-going messages to employees.
- Preparedness of employees to work effectively from home.
- Other.

We hope this checklist will help you quickly resume operations in a way that protects your employees and customers, while permitting you to continue what you do best. Keep apprised of the most recent developments nationally and locally and adjust your plans accordingly.

If you have any questions or would like deeper guidance on any aspect that we've covered, please give us a call. We're here to help.

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