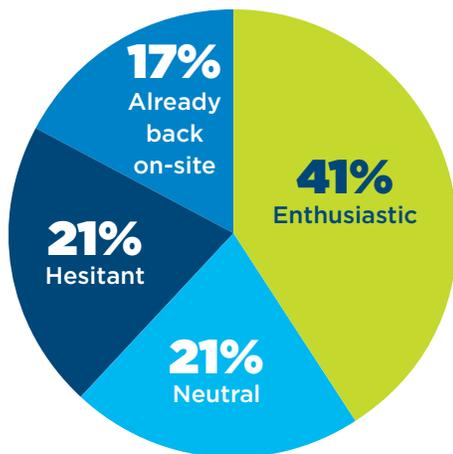




Five ways employers can help people transition back to the workplace – whether they want to return or not

Employers are making arrangements to bring people back to the workplace, and while some people can't wait to get back, others are not looking forward to it. In fact, one in five employees are hesitant about returning to an office environment, while two in five are enthusiastic, according to a recent Humantel survey of U.S. workers.* Most of the remaining workers didn't feel strongly one way or the other.

Respondents' feelings about returning to the worksite



The reasons for these attitudes vary widely. The relatively small group of “hesitant” returners may have concerns about health and safety, believe they are more productive working from home, or have limited child or family care options available. “Enthusiastic” returners may miss the

structure and social connections or believe that being physically present improves opportunities for career advancement. Regardless, employers invested in rebuilding or reinforcing a strong, healthy work culture should seek to understand and respect individual feelings about returning and provide a supportive environment for everyone.

A key factor to consider is an individual's sense of professional well-being. This refers to how much employees feel connected to, and valued by, their employers. It also includes the activities and techniques people use to help them stay sharp, motivated, and healthy at work. Preserving professional well-being among both enthusiastic and hesitant returners can make a significant impact on their engagement and productivity as companies make and implement plans to bring workers back to in-person work.

What employees look for in support of their professional well-being

The Humantel survey asked enthusiastic and hesitant returners to identify the key aspects of supervisors, teams, work environments, organizations, and benefits packages that strongly motivate them to care for their professional well-being and perform their best work.



At the organizational level, both groups are looking for similar types of support: clear instructions, fair policies and benefits, time for a life away from work, and financial incentives. The meaningful differences – and opportunities for business leaders to make an impact – lie in the day-to-day interactions with employees and work teams. For example, people who look forward to coming back generally want to work with others and make an impact as part of a team. Conversely, workers who are hesitant prioritize being set up for success and given the freedom to achieve that success on their own terms. The differences in the top five priorities by employee group are highlighted in the chart below.*

ENTHUSIASTIC RETURNERS	HESITANT RETURNERS
Want supervisors who...	
Are likeable people	Let them work without constant surveillance ■
Provide clear, understandable, and complete instructions♦	Provide clear, understandable, and complete instructions♦
Communicate openly and transparently	Communicate openly and transparently
Listen with respect and attention	Listen with respect and attention
Have realistic expectations about what can be accomplished	Have realistic expectations about what can be accomplished
Wish to be part of teams that...	
Have complementary skills and abilities ♦	Have a work group they personally like ■
Provide good coordination of everyone's inputs and efforts	Provide good coordination of everyone's inputs and efforts♦
Are a team in the true sense of the word	Are a team in the true sense of the word
Make the most of individual strengths in the group	Make the most of individual strengths in the group
Have a clear sense of objectives for the group	Have a clear sense of objectives for the group
In work environments that...	
Have a positive impact on the company ♦	Do work that has a positive impact on our customers
Make people feel secure in their jobs	Make people feel comfortable being their true selves
Set clear, attainable goals ■	Help people feel comfortable in their workspace ■
Make people feel safe from emotional harm at work	Make people feel safe from emotional harm at work
Prioritize mental health	Prioritize mental health♦
Within organizations that provide...	
Rewards allocated in fair and proper ways	Flexibility in hours and location of work ■
Fair policies and processes in place for difficult decisions♦	Fair policies and processes in place for difficult decisions
Adequate time off	Adequate time off
A fair and competitive benefits package	A fair and competitive benefits package♦
Regular rewards for a job well done	Regular rewards for a job well done
And benefits packages that include...	
Wellness programs (e.g., gym memberships, nutritionists, smoking cessation programs)	Training and development programs, including tuition reimbursement
Life insurance ■	Ample paid time off ♦■
Comprehensive employer-sponsored medical coverage♦	Comprehensive employer-sponsored medical coverage
Retirement programs (e.g., 401k, pension)	Retirement programs (e.g., 401k, pension)
Financial incentives (e.g., profit sharing, stock options, annual raise)	Financial incentives (e.g., profit sharing, stock options, annual raise)

Please note: Top five contributing factors per category are reported in no particular order. Top responses from each employee group are denoted with ♦. Responses marked with ■ are attributes that contribute to the professional well-being for roughly the same percentage of enthusiastic and hesitant responders, even though they are listed among the top five priorities for only one of the employee groups.

Both employee groups have the potential to contribute greatly to their organizations. It is important for hesitant returners to feel comfortable coming back to the workplace and for enthusiastic returners to maintain their zeal. Employers and leaders who understand how people feel about returning to the workplace, and what motivates them to maintain and enhance their professional well-being, will have greater success in getting the most from their workforce.



Employers can help people transition back to the workplace – whether they want to return or not – by engaging employees and fostering individual well-being.

Here are five ways:

- 1 Be understanding.** Lack of enthusiasm for coming back to a workplace doesn't necessarily mean a lack of commitment. Some people may have concerns and suggestions that need to be heard. Employees need to feel it is okay to speak out, and simply listening with empathy and compassion can go a long way to strengthening workforce camaraderie.
- 2 Stay connected.** Ongoing communication will help employees better understand the plans and policies for returning to the workplace, as well as offer opportunities to address concerns and increase employee alignment. Managers need to maintain regular team interactions whether in person or remotely. Further, regular check-ins with team members help leaders gauge individual comfort levels and better understand how they can best support their employees.
- 3 Be consistent.** Changing or contradictory policies can undermine employee trust. If plans do need to change, be sure to communicate these changes, and the reasons for them, well in advance.
- 4 Yet be flexible when possible.** Some workers will need time to readjust. Managers who can modify work arrangements to meet individual needs (by offering flexible schedules and remote work options, for example) can help ease the transition back to the workplace.
- 5 Offer resources.** Stress and burnout have been growing concerns, and a move back to the workplace is likely to create some turbulence. Caregiving is also a key challenge for a number of workers. Make sure employees know they have resources available to them for getting any additional support they may need, such as counseling via an employee assistance program and more comprehensive behavioral health care through the company's health plan, including options to connect with a mental health professional virtually. Employees with Cigna health plan coverage can access their benefits at myCigna.com.



*Data for this study was taken as part of the Humantel Wellness Collective's pulse survey on professional well-being. Data was collected through an online survey of 1,975 people in the United States, aged 18 to 74, employed full- or part-time, conducted in March and April 2021.

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