Managing Complexities during COVID-19

The Return to Work

Continue to leverage your COVID-19 task force to set a clear policy regarding who returns to work when. Consider a phased return and "pod" scheduling to limit group exposure. Be sure to keep job descriptions updated to accurately capture essential functions of a job. These essential functions will determine those employees who may need to return in-person sooner than others.

Resistance to Returning

Acknowledge varying personal situations and reactions to the pandemic. Employees are facing a myriad of circumstances - school-aged children not returning to school, caring for elderly family and even personal health conditions. Handle these situations as if they are major life events - with compassion and flexibility. Proactively establish a clear policy for implications of positive test results for employees, family members and close contact. Provide a script to use when having discussions about positive results with employees, team members and customers.

Wearing the Mask

Establish your safety policy in accordance with national and local mandates, as well as your business practices. Be sure to address any travel restrictions, health conditions that may prevent mask-wearing and the ability to wear (or not wear) face shields. Clearly address consequences of employee non-compliance within the policy and manage accordingly. Provide exterior signage to inform customers of business policies and prepare employees to handle non-compliant customers.
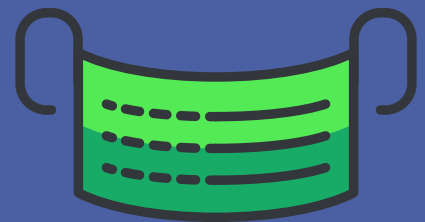
The School Issue

Parents, grandparents and other family members may express the need for time off related to childcare based on changing school and daycare openings. Ensure equity regarding who can take time off, how much time can be taken and when employees are eligible. If employees are managing work and children at home, encourage them to block time on their calendars for personal appointments, within reason. Acknowledge the significant stress associated with these situations and provide supporting resources, like an EAP or flexible schedules.

Progress Requires Feedback

Make sure your COVID-19 task force is continually gathering employee feedback, especially during times of higher risk like returning to school or holidays with large family gatherings. Solicit feedback from a variety of employee groups, including those in various phases of life and with different backgrounds. Gather feedback to understand what's working and what isn't through formal and informal channels - surveys and hallway conversations can both provide meaningful data.

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