

## Managing the Transition Back to Work

There's no doubt the pandemic has changed the way we work and live. Many people who have never worked from home found themselves learning to adapt to the "new normal" of not being in the office. That took tremendous adjusting. Today, many employers are requiring employees to go back to their office part-time or full-time. This transition has understandably created significant stress and anxiety about going back to the workplace, as we've been in a chronic state of change and uncertainty over the past 3 years.

There's no doubt returning to work will require adjustments. While in the office, you no longer need to worry and apologize about background noise from your pets, kids, or your neighbor mowing the lawn. However, it may take some time to get used to distractions and noise from coworkers, returning to the commute, less time with your loved ones, and other differences between WFH and working in the office.

To cope with change, set some boundaries with yourself and others. Working at home during the pandemic blurred the lines between work and leisure time. Maybe you did household chores or ran some errands throughout the day. Perhaps you regularly responded to emails after hours or on the weekend because of the proximity of your work computer to your living room. Now's the time to set new boundaries.

### Strategies for Successful Workplace Reintegration

To help you emotionally and mentally prepare for a successful return back to the office, please continue reading these self-care tips.

- **Shift your mindset back into a routine by starting your day right.** Establish a structured morning routine that works for you and starts your day on the right foot. If you are a planner, plan your outfit, a nutritious breakfast, and set the coffee maker the night before. Also, carve out time for yourself in the morning for self-care – even five or ten minutes can set you up for success. Practice a morning meditation, journal, stretch, or set intentions for the day.
- **Think positively.** According to neuroscience, the brain creates neural pathways based on our habits and behaviors. When negative thinking becomes the norm, it becomes our default pattern. With positive thinking and repeated new behaviors, we train our brains to create new neural pathways. As the pathways become stronger, positive thinking can become the new normal. Using mindfulness practices and CBT thought exercises, you can avoid catastrophic, negative, and fear-based thinking and replace those messages with positive affirmations and mantras about the transition such as, "I trust all will be well," "We will all adjust and be fine," or "I welcome change and growth." Resist the urge to complain, as it will often just bring you down and others along with you.
- **Practice gratitude and acceptance.** Gratitude is a choice and it can help positively reframe negative situations, so focus on the positives. Let go of that which you can't control (your employer's policies), and control what you can (your attitude, preparation, and choice to access support from others through the process).
- **Manage your sleep.** Set a notification one hour before your optimal bedtime. Use the next 30 minutes to wrap up what you are doing and then put away your device for the night. Use the next 30 minutes to read, journal, take a hot lavender bath, or do a guided meditation.
- **Don't ditch the workout.** Establish a workout routine by putting it on your calendar and then visualize yourself doing it. Create accountability for yourself through sharing a workout on social media or

identifying an exercise accountability partner. Make it a realistic routine so you aren't setting yourself up for failure.

- **Look the part.** Working from home gave us an opportunity to loosen up that professional look. Now that you are going back to the office, make sure your clothes fit, and you feel comfortable in them. Take time to put yourself together in the morning. This can improve your mood, confidence, and feelings of self-esteem.
- **Reintegrate the commute time.** One of the biggest perks of working from home was the zero commute time. You can get that time back by commuting to work with friends or co-workers or listening to podcasts, audiobooks, or music during your commute. Use this time to reinvigorate yourself and be sure to add some cushion time to decrease stress.
- **Plan for healthy meal prep throughout the week.** Sundays are a good day for meal planning for the entire week. If you don't have time, consider meal-kit providers that deliver healthy prepped food to your doorstep.
- **Manage your dependents.** Maybe you were able to eliminate child care costs or pet sitter costs because you worked from home. Be grateful for the money you saved. Now, take time to research the most convenient, dependable, and affordable options for you.
- **Introduce daily self-care practices at work.** Pack a self-care kit for work including healthy snacks, teas, hand lotions, essential oils, sneakers to go for a walk during lunch, etc. Consider anything else that will make you comfortable or give you a refresh throughout the day.
- **Recalibrate expectations to zero.** Before heading back to work, mentally scan for any expectations you may have, mindfully let them go, and cultivate an attitude of openness and receptivity. This will help you be more flexible, adaptable, and resilient through the process of change and transition.
- **Delegate and access support.** Maybe you've taken on more responsibilities while working at home. Before you jump back in, create a to-do list and ask yourself, "Am I the best person to do this? Am I the only person who can do this? Do I enjoy doing this? Is this worth my time?" Outsource tasks you don't enjoy, when possible. Identify where you need help, including emotional support, and ask for it.
- **Embrace mindfulness.** Mindfulness is especially useful as it facilitates creativity, flexibility, and adaptability which enhances decision-making and financial outcomes. Recording your mindfulness practices in an app or journal can keep you on track.

Change is hard, especially when it disrupts a routine, so practice self-compassion and self-care and implement these strategies today.

**If you feel the need for additional support, reach out to Workplace Solutions, your EAP, for confidential, professional guidance at 800-327-5071. For more information on this topic and other related resources, visit our website at [www.wseap.com](http://www.wseap.com), click log-in and enter access code Publicis.**

---

Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. (2021, July 1). *Work From Home During the COVID-19 Outbreak: The Impact on Employees' Remote Work Productivity, Engagement, and Stress*. Retrieved from URL: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33883531/>

---

Psychology Today. (2022, January 26). *13 Tips for Transitioning Back to the Office*. Retrieved from URL: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-wealth/202201/13-tips-for-transitioning-back-to-the-office>