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Refocusing at Work After COVID-19

In many places, local orders to quarantine or stay-at-home are being lifted. Companies are making plans to resume operations. This will likely be a slow process that varies greatly depending on where you live and the type of job you have.

You may be excited, or even a little apprehensive, about returning to your workplace. Your workday may not look the same as it did before, and there will likely be new procedures to follow. For many, working from home was a new experience that required a big adjustment in how they performed their duties. Returning to work will be another adjustment. Here are some ideas that can help make this next adjustment a bit easier.

Familiarize yourself with your company's new procedures, and make a plan.

Your work schedule or duties may not look the same when you return to work. Many companies will be making accommodations to continue to prevent the spread of COVID-19. As an example, this may take the form of split work weeks, where you spend part of your time in the office and part of your time working from home. Understanding what is expected of you will help you to meet those expectations. Having a plan for your week will help you keep track of when and where you are working, as well as what tasks you need to complete that week. Be sure to talk to your manager if you have any questions or concerns about the new policies or expectations for your job.

Create a checklist to make sure you have all the supplies you need.

Take time to gather any work equipment that you need to bring back to the office. Make sure this is organized and ready to go the night before, so that you can grab it on your way out the door the next morning. Be sure to include things you might need to protect yourself, such as cleaning supplies to help sanitize your workspace, or protective wear, like gloves and a mask. Since you may be moving between work and working from home for a while, organizing a work bag for yourself could keep you from forgetting something important.

Allow yourself extra time.

A morning commute is not really a part of people's lives right now, but it will be again. It may take some adjustments to your routine to get out the door on time to make it into work. When you do return to your workplace, allow yourself extra time for your commute. Keep in mind any new procedures for drop-off at your child care provider and any additional time you may need for that. If you arrive at work early, you will have time to settle back into your workspace. You may want to clean or sanitize your area before you begin the day, or you may want to spend some time rearranging things to help you work more efficiently.

It will be exciting to see people again face-to-face, so try to socialize mainly during break times.

Remember to keep social distancing measures in place as you return to work, keeping six feet between you and your coworkers when possible. The ability to talk to your coworkers face-to-face for the first time in a long time will be a tempting distraction from work for the first few days. Socialization is important and catching up with coworkers can ease the stress about COVID-19. So, while there's work to do, you can expect that most employers are going to initially allow a bit more time for people to reconnect as they come back to work.

Adaptability is an important skill to develop.

By adjusting to life in quarantine, you have already proven you can be adaptable. The way you work and the tasks you are responsible for now may need to change to prevent the spread of COVID-19 or accommodate new business realities. Try to be understanding and remain patient with yourself and your coworkers.

Take it one step and one day at a time.

Don't try to take on too much at once and become overwhelmed. Staying organized and focusing on one task at a time will help you get back into the swing of working at work. Remember it will take time to adjust to the new normal in your workplace. Don't try to rush yourself or others. Everyone will adjust to being back in the workplace differently. It is important to find what works for you.

Practice meditation or mindfulness exercises.

The skills and techniques you learn from the practice of mindfulness or meditation can help you relax, reduce stress, and improve your focus. These techniques can bring you back to the present moment and help you calm a chaotic mind. This calmness will give you the focus needed to complete the tasks assigned to you. Taking a few minutes in the day to reset yourself may be just what you need to get through a particularly difficult task.

Contact your employee assistance program (EAP) if you need help adjusting.

Be sure to take care of your health as you return to work, including mental health. This is a stressful time and transitioning back to the workplace can add extra stress. Your EAP is available to help you process these emotions and refocus. Additionally, your EAP can assist with locating various resources that may be helpful at this time, including child care and mental health providers.

Source: Gaddis, A. (2020, April 27). Refocusing at work after COVID-19 (C. Gregg-Meeker, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options.

Connect With Yourself

Is your life incredibly busy? Maybe you have tons of work, chores, social or community engagements, or caregiving responsibilities. You probably want to spend time connecting with friends and family, too. However, it's also really important to connect with yourself — to take some “me time.”

Taking some quiet time for yourself will help you figure out what you like about yourself and what matters to you. Spend some time hanging out with the person you will know your whole life: yourself!

Every day, try to set aside all of your responsibilities and distractions for a little while. Here are some tips for unwinding and focusing on your inner self:

- Take a long shower or bath.
- Write down your thoughts and feelings. Start a personal journal.
- Practice deep breathing, meditation or other relaxation techniques. For meditation, you might just sit quietly and focus on your breath.
- Listen to some soothing music.
- Go for a walk in nature or someplace pretty.
- Express yourself through art, singing or some other creative hobby.
- Try a physical activity. Some people clear their heads while jogging or doing yoga, for example.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health (OWH), GirlsHealth. (Updated 2015, March 4). Connect with yourself. In Your feelings: Being happy. Retrieved October 17, 2017, from <https://www.girlshealth.gov/>

Budgeting in Uncertain Times

The current global pandemic is impacting every aspect of people's lives, and for many, that includes finances. Taking a close look at your personal finances and making a plan can help alleviate some of the stress around the impact of COVID-19. Budgeting for the current pandemic has many of the same basic steps you would take if you were creating a budget at any other time.

Take a moment to look at your current finances. The first step is to figure out your starting point. Take note of what you have in savings and your current income. If your job or your partner's job may be at risk, even if you are still working currently, it is a good idea to familiarize yourself with your state's unemployment benefits. If you are not working while in quarantine, this will give you a good idea of what your adjusted income will be.

What are you spending? The second step is to figure out what your expenses are. Include all regular expenses, like rent or mortgage payments, utilities, car payments, credit card or student loan debt, and food. Less common expenses, such as fun budget items like eating out and other purchases for personal entertainment, should also be noted. Be mindful of how much you usually allot for these expenses and any changes you feel that you can make to these amounts.

Prioritize! Looking at the list of expenses that you have just created, determine what are the most important items on the list. Basic needs, like food and housing, are at the top of the priority list. The greatest cuts to your budget will be to areas that are wants and not needs. Some items, like Federal student loans, can be moved lower on the priority list than they would be normally, as interest rates have currently been waived.

Additionally, most utility companies are not shutting off services for nonpayment during the pandemic. Interest rates may continue to accrue during this time on utilities, so it is best to continue to pay utilities if possible. Be sure that you are speaking with your creditors at this time to determine what their response to COVID-19 will be and if you will have any flexibility with these bills.

Locate assistance resources. Congress is currently working out what additional aid will be offered to individuals impacted by COVID-19. Communities are already working together to provide food assistance for those in need. Keep in mind that financial assistance is always a limited resource. A good starting place when trying to locate financial assistance programs is by calling 211 or going online at <https://www.unitedway.org/our-impact/featured-programs/2-1-1>.

Save where you can. Even if your income will not be impacted by the current pandemic, it's a good idea to create a budget and create a savings plan. That way you'll be prepared for other possible disruptions in the future.

Remember this is temporary. COVID-19 will have a lasting impact on society, but things will eventually return to normal. Small business will reopen. Stock markets will rebound. The economy will recover. Continue to pay down debt where you can, even if payments are waived. This can help prevent trouble later when regular payments begin again.

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