



Transitioning Back to the Workplace

Strategies to ease the transition BY LIZ BROWN, PCC

LAST MARCH, “business as usual” came to an abrupt halt as we were thrust into a time of great uncertainty and fear from the pandemic. What began as “Two weeks to stop the spread” became many months of a combination of remote work, virtual meetings, and working in an office with reduced staff. After the first month or two, most businesses were able to adapt to create a “new normal” for employees and remain productive. To say the time was stressful is an understatement, but most were able to adapt to the many demands caused by working and going to school from home.

As we begin to step back into the workplace, the transition might cause stress for many. Whether you are excited about getting back to the physical office or not, change can create some level of discomfort. Being prepared for the mental components of change can help reduce the impact. Here are some ways to ease the transition.

Create a stress reduction ritual. Try deep breathing, quiet walking, listening to music, gentle stretching, or journaling to reduce your stress. Start now so it will be a habit as you return to the office. These habits can help reduce the automatic fight or response that comes when we feel there is a threat in our environment. Since we have all been living with the feeling that there is a threat to our health in public places for the past year, it might take time even with the decreased threat to let the anxious feeling go.

Talk to others about your concerns. Everyone has been impacted by the shutdown in different ways but what we have in common is that it has been a time of challenge. While we do not want to dwell on the past, talk-

ing about fears and concerns with trusted friends, coworkers, or a professional, will help you process your thoughts and feel more in control.

Prepare for change. Working from home has its advantages. No commute, less formal work attire, and more flexibility with time. Transitioning back to the office has advantages as well. More social interaction, less distraction, and an increase in collaboration. Start to think about what you are looking forward to doing once you return. Maybe schedule a lunch or a walk with a colleague. Also, begin to plan for the commute, wearing business attire, and a more defined working day. This transition might be a good time to reevaluate pre-COVID habits that were not useful or necessary and think about new ways to schedule your day. This might be a useful exercise to do as a team as well.

Set expectations. It will take some time to readjust to the change. It is not like we are just coming back from a weeklong vacation. Allow some time in your schedule to reconnect with co-workers and others you have not seen “live” in the past year.

Enjoy! The past year has been difficult and as we are getting the virus under control, enjoy the process of catching up with people and savoring the normal of now. ■



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