



# OFFICE **RE-ENTRY INDEX**

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*VOLUME II*

## LASALLE NETWORK

Today, COVID-19 infection rates have plummeted and 65% of Americans have been vaccinated, leading the CDC to remove several key precautions, such as restricted capacities and the mask mandate for those who are vaccinated. Many cities across the U.S. have reopened, leading to a renewed focus on planning for when and how to bring employees back into the office.

LaSalle Network conducted a survey in March and again in June 2021 of more than **350 Chief Executive Officers, Chief Operating Officers, and Human Resources and Finance leaders** on sentiments and plans for returning to the office. This second installment the Office Re-Entry Index includes comparisons to the first Index and how plans and sentiments shifted over the last several months.

This report shares need-to-know information, suggestions for communicating with staff, legal considerations for mask and vaccination policies, data on timelines and strategies for office re-entry, considerations for a hybrid workforce and more.

WHERE WE ARE  
**TODAY**



While planning for office re-entry, businesses should expect some degree of backlash, as there is no one policy that can please every employee. Already, several major news stories have broken of negative employee reactions to certain return-to-office policies. One such example is the [letter supported by 2,800 Apple employees sent to Tim Cook and other Apple executives](#) in June. There are [many other stories](#) of employees deciding to quit their jobs, rather than returning to the office, across many businesses and industries. Employers should consider the potential for similar backlash within their own organizations and take steps now to mitigate its effects, overcommunicating with staff and preparing for every situation.

This report shares need-to-know information, suggestions for communicating with staff, legal considerations for mask and vaccination policies, data on timelines and strategies for office re-entry, considerations for a hybrid workforce and more.



WHERE WE 'RE GOING  
**TOMORROW**

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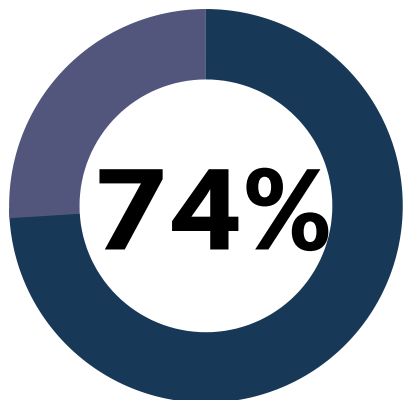
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Bringing Employees

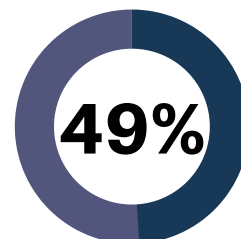
# BACK INTO THE OFFICE

*Timeline for Employees' Return*



of businesses report they will bring employees back to the office **by fall 2021**. This is an increase from just 49% planning their re-entry by fall 2021 according to our March survey

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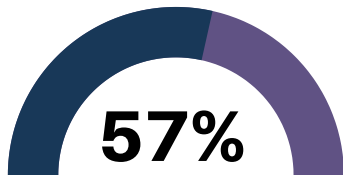


Office re-entry dates for many businesses have moved up or become solidified for the first time since our March 2021 survey, as 74% of businesses now report they will be back in the office by fall 2021. According to a poll taken of 200+ business leaders attending LaSalle Network's Office Re-Entry Virtual Event in May, **20% moved up their re-entry dates earlier than they originally anticipated.**

## Bringing Employees

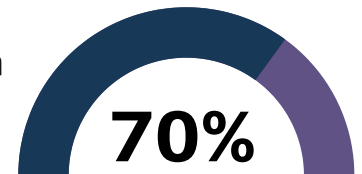
# BACK INTO THE OFFICE

## *Timeline for Employees' Return*



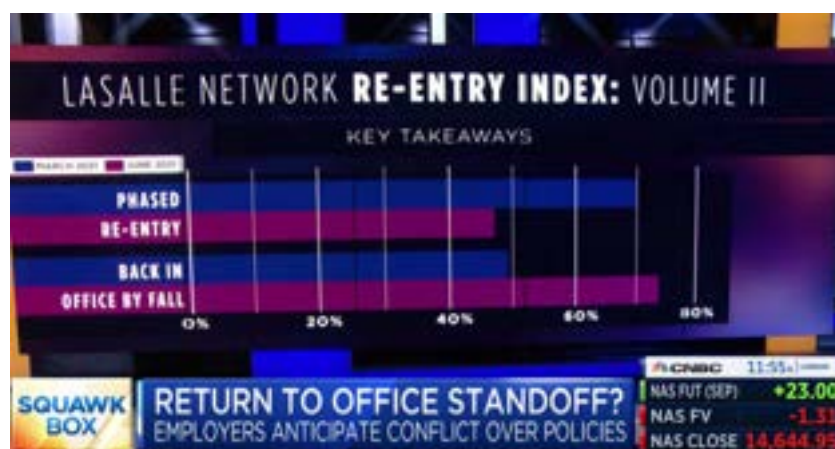
of businesses plan on phasing employees back, rather than coming in all at one time.

This is a decline from 70% of survey respondents in March saying they planned to phase employees back in.



With changing CDC recommendations as infection rates decline and the vaccine becoming more widely distributed, many cities around the U.S. have lifted capacity limits, allowing more offices to be able to return to their full capacity sooner than planned. This is likely a factor for many companies not only moving their return date up, but also eliminating a phased approach to office re-entry.

AS SEEN ON CNBC SQUAWK BOX





## Bringing Employees

# BACK INTO THE OFFICE

## *Communicating Re-Entry Plans*

Businesses should inform employees of re-entry plans at least several weeks before they are expected to return, if possible, to give employees ample time to digest the plans and prepare themselves and their household for a change in routine.

While communicating with employees regarding re-entry planning, whether it be communicating changes to an established plan or presenting the plan for the first time, leaders should be clear and empathetic. With more than 40% of Americans experiencing symptoms of anxiety over the last year, reducing uncertainty and educating employees on how the business intends to keep them safe will be important. Being clear in exactly what is expected of employees and what individual responsibilities each holds will be essential to keeping the office safe.

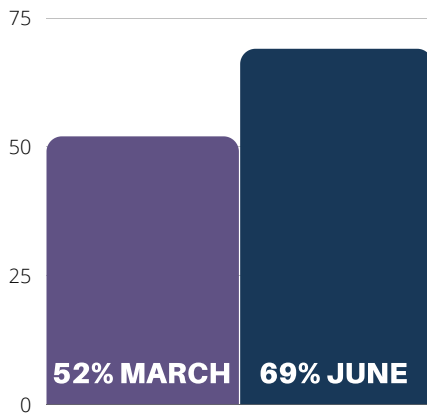
This includes providing information on:

- Office re-entry timeline
- Work from home policies
- Vaccination and mask-wearing policies
- Office cleaning and sanitization
- Policies on guests in the office or external in-person meetings
- Other office policies or norms that may have changed such as dress code, building access, common room usage, etc.



# OFFICE POLICIES

## *Vaccination Considerations*



More businesses have decided not to mandate the COVID-19 vaccine since March, now with **more than 2/3** reporting they do not plan to require employees to receive the vaccine.

**When it comes to vaccination policies, there are three primary policies many employers are considering:**

1. Allowing all employees to return to the office regardless of vaccination status and not mandating masks or asking for vaccination status
2. Allowing everyone to return regardless of vaccination status but requiring those unvaccinated to wear masks at all times or in other cases requiring proof of negative COVID-19 tests
3. Requiring all employees to be vaccinated before returning to the office and keeping those who decide not to be vaccinated working from home

If an employee cannot work from home and chooses not to receive the vaccine, they may be able to be terminated. According to the article linked - employers should provide reasonable accommodations when applicable and prior to termination. Policies must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII) and other workplace laws, according to the EEOC, meaning there may be exceptions for those unable to receive the vaccine due to health or religious reasons.

For more legal considerations on mandating the vaccine or not, [click here](#).



# OFFICE POLICIES

## *Communication Regarding Vaccine Policies*

According to our survey in March, **66% of respondents had not yet communicated vaccine mandate decisions** with employees. Now, as re-entry dates get closer, many of these businesses will need to map out and begin communication plans if they have not already. Especially if opting to mandate the vaccine, employers should begin this communication sooner, rather than later, and consider offering help from the Human Resources and legal departments in finding and scheduling vaccinations for employees.

If opting not to mandate the vaccine, but wanting to encourage employees to get it, some companies have created various incentive programs. A few examples include:

- American Airlines offers an extra vacation day and \$50
- Kroger offers its employees a one-time payment of \$100 if they show proof of their vaccination. If employees decline the vaccine due to religious or health reasons, they can take a health and safety course provided by Kroger and receive the payment.
- Target teamed up with Lyft to reimburse employees for rides to and from vaccine appointments and is offering employees up to four hours of pay for work time missed



# COMMUNICATION REGARDING VACCINE POLICIES



## VACCINE DOCUMENTATION

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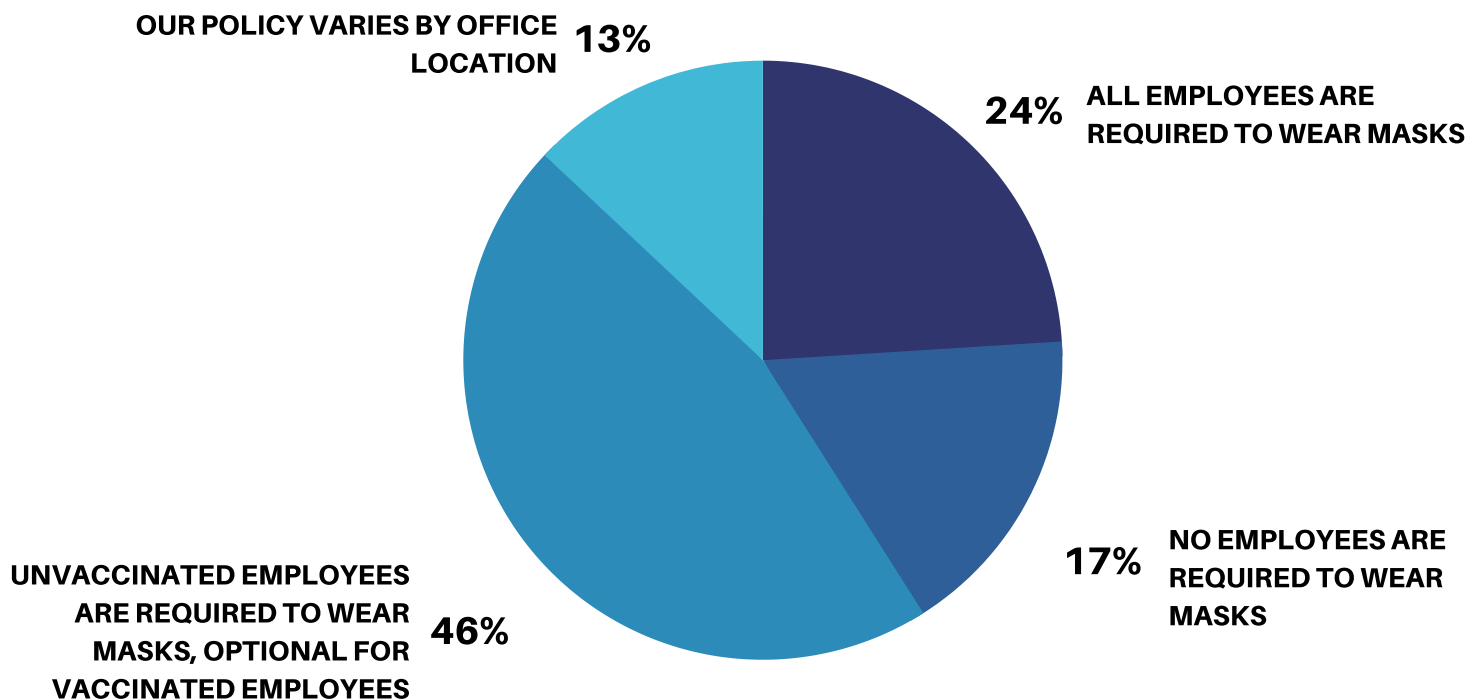
In most cases, employers may collect proof of vaccination from employees in order for them to return to the office or remove their masks, depending on company policy. It may be a good idea for employers to give their employees the option of sharing their vaccine status. Choosing not to provide proof of vaccination may mean they will be unable to return to the office or will have to continue wearing a mask. Employers should avoid making medical inquiries that could run afoul of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); however, simply asking for proof of a COVID-19 vaccination is permissible under the ADA. Employers should speak to their legal teams and keep an eye on changes as litigation regarding this might come in the future.

Collecting documentation of proof of vaccination should be done in a secure way through the Human Resources department, such as through an email address dedicated to collecting this information, and those with access to this information should enforce a strict confidentiality policy.



# OFFICE POLICIES

## *Mask Policies*



At the time of the survey, the CDC had recently removed the mask mandate for fully vaccinated individuals.

Before informing employees of a mask policy, offices should check with their buildings' policies regarding shared spaces such as the lobby, elevator, hallways or public restrooms, and ensure the company policy adheres to the building's code. Communicate clearly with employees the specifics of where and when masks will be required. Consider hanging signage throughout the office to remind employees of these policies, as well.



# MASK POLICIES



Continued communication and reminders on mask policies will be important, especially in the case of certain employees having to wear masks while others do not. Continued communication surrounding mask policies and other safety procedures is also a way employers can help ease stress for those anxious to be returning to the office.

***Ensure employees know they are welcome to wear a mask whenever they choose, if they prefer to do so, even if it is not required.***

If the company policy mandates unvaccinated employees to wear masks while it is optional for vaccinated staff to do so, businesses should be aware this could create an uncomfortable environment for some employees. Because vaccination status could be identifiable by mask-wearing, companies may need to create policies against asking other employees about their vaccine status and reasons for not receiving the vaccine. Ensure it is communicated to all employees that everyone can wear a mask if they so desire, and that different people have their own reasons for being vaccinated or not. In the case that unvaccinated employees are unable to come into the workplace, employers should create a plan to ensure they are able to remain connected and have similar work opportunities. If left unaddressed, these policies could cause a divide between vaccinated and unvaccinated employees.

# EXTERNAL MEETINGS/GUESTS



Businesses, while planning their re-entry, should consider their company's guest policy. This may include whether guests will be allowed to enter the office, if they must wear masks, or if they must present proof of vaccination. They also may consider policies regarding the hiring process, and if candidates will be required to present proof of vaccination prior to in-person interviews.

There is also some amount of risk associated with employees traveling or meeting with clients outside the office, in ways that may be less regulated. Communicate with employees if they fall ill during or after business travel or external business events they should go home immediately. Employers should have policies in place in how to deal with employees who have symptoms of COVID-19 so as to avoid spread to other employees.

Before bringing employees back into the office, businesses should consider their **contingency plan** for if a COVID-19 outbreak occurs. This may include contact tracing, having certain or all employees return home to self-quarantine, regular deep cleaning of the office, and other precautions. Some businesses have decided they will continue to contact trace and will require anyone exposed and unvaccinated or partially vaccinated to self-quarantine for two weeks. In those situations, those fully vaccinated will not be required to do so.

While creating a contingency plan, business leaders should consider the demographic of their people as well, considering if there is a large population of at-risk individuals or parents of young children who may fear bringing the virus home, if exposed. There may be some employees needing extra accommodations or flexibility.

## PREPARING FOR COLD & FLU SEASON

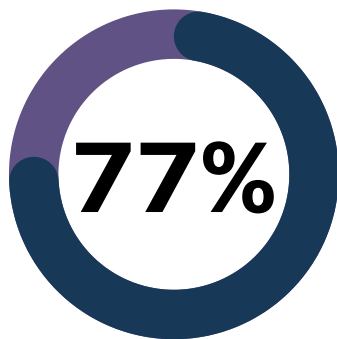
Looking to the future, employers may want to consider how this year's cold and flu season may impact their workforce. After being isolated for nearly a year and a half, many employees may not have been exposed to illness for some time and the 2021 flu season is predicted to be severe.

Businesses should plan to over-communicate with employees regarding sick leave policies and remind employees regularly not to come into the office if they do not feel well. Communicate also that if an employee begins to feel ill at work, regardless of if symptoms are characteristic of COVID-19 or not, they should go home immediately or follow your company policy.

Communicate ahead of time with employees that anyone who wants to wear a mask during flu season should. Employers should consider now if and how they will encourage employees to receive the flu vaccine when available, and how to encourage sick employees to stay home to prevent the spread of disease.



# THE FUTURE IS HYBRID



of companies are planning a hybrid office for the future

According to our recent survey, majority of respondents foresee their businesses having a hybrid workforce one year from now, which is consistent with responses from March's survey.

*There are several structures of hybrid workforces, including:*

**Hybrid individuals:** This is when individual employees work both in-office and remotely during the week, with certain days working from the office and certain days remotely.

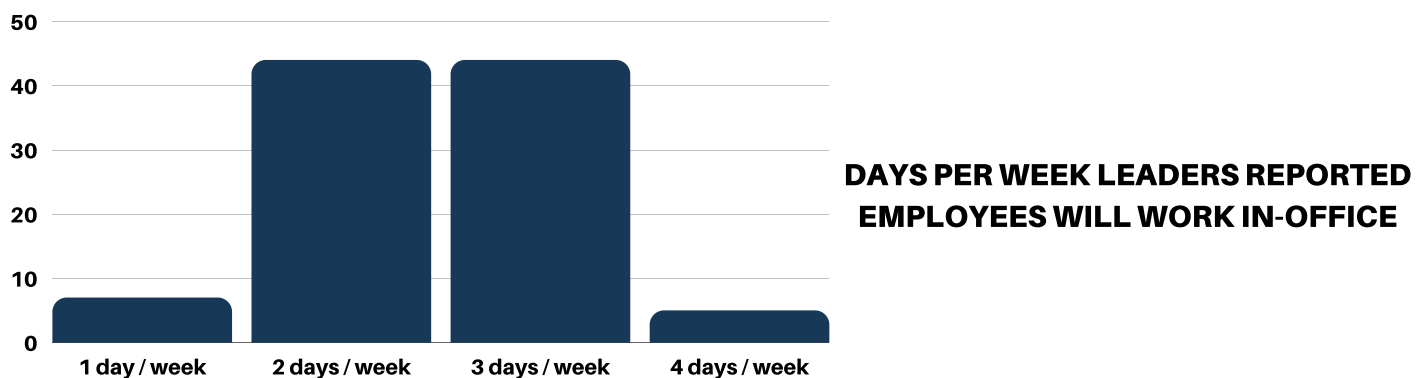
**Hybrid teams:** This is when within one team there are both fully on-site individuals and fully remote individuals.

**Hybrid departments:** This is when there are full teams of remote workers and full teams of on-site staff within the organization.

# STRUCTURING IN-OFFICE DAYS

Just as there was a steep learning curve while employees transitioned to remote work in March 2020, leaders should expect another adjustment period as employees return to the office. Many teams may benefit from more structured in-office days that support collaboration, connection and employee engagement.

Especially as many employees will be accustomed to working independently after being remote for so long, leaders should consider how to provide opportunities for intentional interaction and strategize ways to maximize working in-person.



For companies planning to offer individuals the ability to work remotely part-time, **87% reported they foresee employees working remotely 2 or 3 days a week.**

Many businesses are choosing to establish specific days for employees to be on-site, versus allowing employees to choose, which is highly recommended to help avoid ostracizing employees based on when they choose to come in, creating definitive cliques within the office, and decreasing diversity within the office.

While planning for when employees will return to the office, many organizations predict they will be in-office Tuesdays through Thursdays with the option for employees to work from home Mondays and Fridays.

# LEADING A HYBRID TEAM

To help support a strong hybrid team, leaders may consider strategies like:



Providing  
Timely  
Feedback

One potential stressor for remote employees is a lack of timely feedback from managers. While they are working from home, they also have less opportunity to learn from teammates, which could stunt their performance and career progression. Scheduling regular touchpoints for feedback is important, but also consider how to connect coworkers and encourage collaboration. This could mean planning regular virtual team building activities or assigning remote employees projects to collaborate on together.



Supporting  
Mental Health

This may be a highly emotional time for employees. Consider scheduling regular touchpoints for both onsite and remote employees. These can serve as an opportunity to check in and manage stress levels, as well as get ideas on how best to care for employees and create a safe work environment.

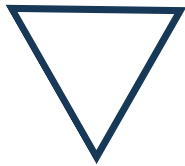


# LEADING A HYBRID TEAM



## Distributing Workload

Especially while managing a blended team, it's important to create a standardized process for all employees to be assigned new projects, have their performance evaluated, and be considered for growth opportunities. Consider also how to provide development opportunities that are applicable to both those remote and those onsite.



## Streamlining Meetings and Collaboration

If video conferencing remote employees to an onsite meeting held in a conference room, consider how to most effectively bring remote employees into the conversation. This could include structuring the meeting in a way that assigns various team members to contribute at different times or going around to ask each person's input before moving on. Set the expectation that each person contributes to the discussion and keep them accountable to this. Time blocking your meetings and sending out an agenda ahead of time can also help provide structure to the conversation.

# LEADING A HYBRID TEAM



## Communication

While your team may have been working together for any number of years, blending onsite and virtual workers creates a new team dynamic that should be addressed. Consider taking a survey of team members, asking them to share their communication preferences. This should include the frequency of communication desired, and preferred communication method, such as phone call, video call, chat or email. Take these responses into consideration while creating a standard operating procedure for the team of how to get support from one another.



# THE FUTURE IS HYBRID

## *Legal Implications of a Hybrid Workforce*

For many businesses, the pandemic has shifted the structure of the workplace to include hybrid work for the first time. There are many elements of hybrid work employers should consider now to be adequately prepared to support their workforce, including potential legal ramifications to prepare for. While creating hybrid work policies, employers should be aware of legal risks that could come with a partially remote workforce.

### *A few aspects to consider include, but are not limited to:*

- Employee relocation and compliance with state regulations, including payroll taxes. Ensure employees communicate with Human Resources and their manager whenever there is a change of address, but especially if an employee is planning on relocating out of state.
- Inappropriate or unequal treatment. Employers should ensure there are equal opportunities for all workers
- Discriminatory work-from-home policies if employees feel they are being treated differently than others. If certain employees have access to perks, such as working from home, that others do not, consider keeping record of why and regulating how these decisions are made.

*For more information regarding these and other legal considerations, [click here](#) and/or contact an attorney.*

# CULTURE IN A HYBRID WORLD

A major concern for many businesses today is how to maintain their culture in a hybrid setting; however, businesses shouldn't assume their teams will return to the same in-office dynamic that existed pre-pandemic. There has been a great deal of change, both at the individual level and at the business level, that has shifted the needs of employers and employees alike. Businesses will need to translate their culture into a hybrid world and find new ways of supporting and engaging employees in the new environment. Below we share three crucial elements to consider.



Communicatio  
n

While working remotely during the pandemic, studies show employees have communicated more frequently and felt more connected to their teammates than pre-pandemic but communicated less frequently with staff outside of their immediate team. To sustain a strong hybrid workforce long-term, organizations will need to strengthen interdepartmental communication.

Leaders should work to set expectations and define best practices for effective communication and cross-departmental collaboration. Also consider strategies for keeping remote and onsite employees informed and involved in relevant projects and decisions. For more communication tips for managers to prepare for re-entry, [click here](#).





# CULTURE IN A HYBRID WORLD



## Connection

While bridging the virtual gap to maintain a strong company culture in a hybrid world, consider the many social and team-building events that could help connect employees, from speed networking between new hires and tenured employees, to philanthropic initiatives, and more. For more than 140 other ideas for maintaining culture virtually, [click here](#).



## Development Opportunities

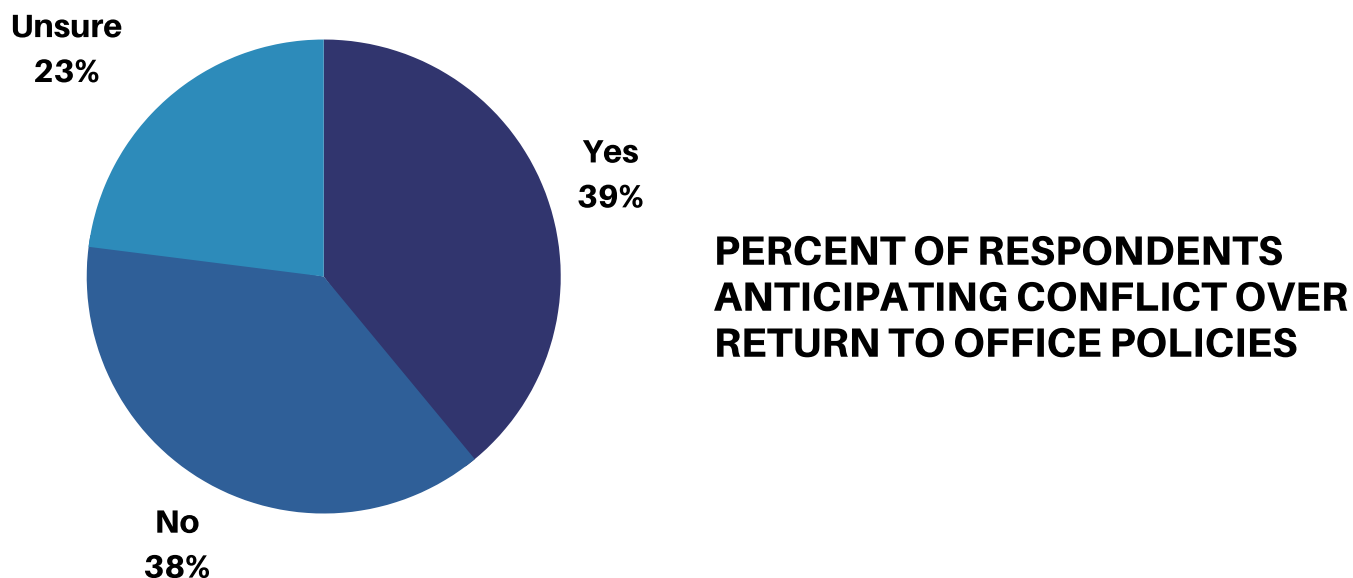
Creating a plan for development of both remote and on-site employees will be essential to supporting a strong hybrid workforce. While being in-office presents some valuable opportunities such as job shadowing or in-person and impromptu time with business leaders, consider how this can be done for remote staff, like providing employees a virtual mentorship program or formal training courses.



## Re-Entry

# OBSTACLES

When asked if they anticipated conflicts arising due to their organization's return-to-office policy, leaders were fairly split.



In March, 34% of survey respondents predicted there would be conflict regarding return-to-office policies. This number has grown slightly as re-entry dates get closer, with 39% now anticipating conflict between staff and executives.

## Re-Entry

# OBSTACLES

In March, the most significant obstacles companies reported facing included managing employees' fear regarding commuting to work. Despite increasing vaccination rates and cities reopening, 37% of survey respondents still predict employee discomfort regarding public transit to be a top obstacle. Others predicted obstacles including getting employees reacclimated to the office and new employees introduced to the in-office norms and culture. For more tips on supporting employee re-onboarding post-pandemic, [click here](#).

### WHAT SOME COMPANIES ARE DOING TO HELP EMPLOYEES COMMUTE SAFELY:

- Arranging carpools between employees living nearby one another
- Providing stipends for employee parking to encourage the use of personal vehicles opposed to public transport
- Providing credits or reimbursements for ride share services
- Providing credits or reimbursements for a bike share program, such as Divvy Bikes, Citi Bike or similar programs
- Allowing flexible commuting hours

## Re-Entry

# OBSTACLES

In our most recent survey, the following are other common conflicts respondents predict facing in office re-entry:

- Employees wanting to continue working remotely, or conflict around how many days they are required to be in-office
- Employee discomfort in mask-wearing policies
- Discomfort in having unvaccinated and vaccinated employees in the office together
- Concern in unequal treatment of remote and on-site workers



## EMPLOYEE DISSATISFACTION WITH RETURN TO OFFICE

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65% of employees who can do their job from home reported they would prefer doing so all or most of the time post-pandemic. Company re-entry planning and hybrid work may impact retention as employees could decide to seek opportunities that are more in alignment with their desired work structure if they are not satisfied with their own company's flexibility.

Businesses may consider their policy and if they are prepared to lose talent based on their re-entry plans, and if they may benefit from offering more flexibility to employees. Some businesses also may offer the option of lateral job moves for employees wanting to work remotely to switch into a role that supports hybrid work.



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Re-Entry

# OBSTACLES



## **DISCOMFORT IN SAFETY POLICIES**

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Employees likely will have a wide array of viewpoints and comfortability levels when it comes to COVID-19 safety procedures. While some employees may be uncomfortable wearing a mask all day, others may have discomfort if unvaccinated and vaccinated employees are together within the office.

While there may not be a way to make every employee feel completely comfortable, it will be helpful to explain what procedures are in place regarding employee safety, including continued contact tracing, mask policies and more. If bringing both unvaccinated and vaccinated employees back into the office, consider designating certain areas of the office for unvaccinated people to remove masks in order to eat, or even having separate work areas.

Establish a way employees can connect with Human Resources to express concerns or health issues and receive proper accommodation, as necessary.



## Re-Entry

# OBSTACLES



## CONCERNS REGARDING UNEQUAL TREATMENT

If re-entry policies include having some employees on-site more frequently than others, consider how this could present unequal opportunities for some, or may cause employees to feel alienated. This could happen for either remote or on-site employees. For example:

- Employees told to stay fully or partially remote could feel alienated from leadership and perceive unequal treatment. Because they would likely have less facetime with leaders while working remotely, these employees may perceive fewer advancement opportunities and less recognition for their work.
- Employees told to be on-site more frequently could perceive unfair policies or discrimination. They may believe they are not trusted as much as some other employees or are being punished by not having the same option to work from home.

To help avoid conflicts or misunderstandings, businesses should be aware of how their remote work policy could cause tension and address it up front. Consider how to include remote and on-site employees in culture and skill building events, such as planning virtual mentorships or events. Consider also if it is possible to offer some increased flexibility to those needing it.

# RE-ENTRY OBSTACLES

## *Preparing for Re-Entry*

Businesses' re-entry plans should consider not only the logistics of ensuring the office is properly set up and ready for employees, but also communicating these plans with employees and strategizing ways to ease their adjustment. While the last 16+ months saw a great deal of uncertainty, readjusting yet again to life in the office may cause anxiety for some employees. Any way employers may reduce stress and uncertainty in their workforce regarding re-entry can help aid a more successful return and well-adjusted workforce.

***“Leaders are not preparing for a big challenge they will face: employees’ emotions and what that adjustment will be like. Emotionally, your employees got used to walking their dogs, seeing their kids, having dinner with their families every night, and there will be an emotional adjustment when they may not easily be able to do this when returning to the office.”***

***LaSalle Network CEO, Tom Gimbel, in an interview with Forbes magazine on office re-entry planning.***

As business leaders prepare for re-entry, many are focused on the physical office and communicating policies with employees prior to the first day back. However, there is much more to consider for supporting a smooth transition back to the office.



## Re-Entry

# OBSTACLES

### *Preparing for Re-Entry*

If they haven't already, managers should start preparing their teams now for how their work and team will change as they return to the office or adjust to a hybrid model. This includes:

- Leading with empathy and understanding the adjustment may be especially challenging for some
- Having regular one-on-ones every two to four weeks, if possible, with staff to check in personally and understand how they are feeling regarding returning to the office, and to understand what additional challenges they may be facing
- Establishing go-to Human Resources personnel for questions and concerns regarding re-entry
- Holding regular team building events and trainings to reconnect employees with one another and strengthen camaraderie
- Training employees on transitioning back into the office, such as office procedures and protocols, team collaboration and communication expectations, increased distractions and more
- Training management to help mitigate common stressors in the office





## Re-Entry

# OBSTACLES

### *Preparing for Re-Entry*



IN EFFORT TO HELP EASE EMPLOYEE TRANSITION BACK INTO THE WORKPLACE, LASALLE NETWORK HAS PLANNED SEVERAL CULTURE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING:

- New hire happy hours at the office prior to the rest of the company's return, with office tours and a chance to meet company leadership
- Mentorship groups for all employees with a year and a half or less tenure, led by a more tenured employee to help answer questions and get new staff connected
- Mental health support groups, led by licensed therapists, for any employee wanting to participate

## Re-Entry

# OBSTACLES

### *Addressing Conflict*


According to a recent study by Harvard Business Review on office re-entry communication, employees who regularly receive updates from their companies are more likely to have positive views of their employer, with 55% more likely to be proud to work for their companies and 43% more likely to look forward to going back to the office.

Companies should take guesswork out for employees as it relates to office re-entry. Leaders should be over-communicating with their people, whether there have been recent updates to their plan or not. They should also work to create an open dialogue with their team, allowing employees to ask questions and express concerns openly, both before and during re-entry. This could be check-ins during one-on-one meetings, team meetings, or via an anonymous survey/question box.

While much of the communication may be coming from executives and Human Resources, managers play an important role in ensuring policies are understood and addressing concerns.

For more tips on how to effectively communicate and prepare for a successful office re-entry, [click here](#).





The COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve and impact business and social atmospheres in different ways. At the time of this report, there are certain countries re-entering new lockdowns and some counties within the U.S. suggesting certain safety precautions be taken specifically against the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus. This situation will continue to be monitored by health professionals; however, it may be something to address with employees sooner, rather than later.

Businesses should include a caveat in their return-to-office planning stating policies may evolve throughout time as the situation progresses, either removing certain precautions when they are no longer necessary or increasing precautions to protect the wellbeing of employees as needed. Ensure company leadership remain vigilant in ensuring safety precautions are in alignment with government and CDC or WHO precautions.

# CONCLUSION

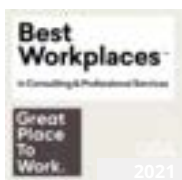


## LASALLE NETWORK

LaSalle Network is a national staffing, recruiting and culture firm with business units that specialize in accounting and finance, administrative, call center, healthcare revenue cycle, human resources, management resources, marketing, sales, supply chain, technology and executive search.

Since inception in 1998, LaSalle has worked with thousands of companies and placed more than 80,000 candidates in temporary, temporary-to-permanent and permanent positions.

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ABOUT

# LASALLE NETWORK