**Prepare Employees Now for Returning to Work**

The COVID-19 pandemic has sent shockwaves through every facet of American life, creating fear, anxiety, and apprehension among the populace and, apart from obvious health and safety issues that are at the forefront of the crisis, its economic impact is no less significant.

Many employers have had little choice but to either close their businesses completely or furlough a large portion of their workforce but, as medical experts keep assuring the nation, “we will get through this together” and yes, eventually we will. In the meantime, employers and their employees alike must play the “waiting game” as the country slowly emerges from the pandemic crisis.

Employers confronted by financial and operational difficulties must not overlook their struggling employees because failing to do so could compound their problems once normal life returns. How employers treat them during the crisis and in its aftermath may have major implications for a company’s future success or failure.

Many furloughed employees are dealing with wide emotional swings unlike any they have ever experienced before. Employers who provide the most support during this difficult time stand to gain or renew employee loyalty and a strengthened commitment to the company. Those who do not may lose employees who believe they were poorly or unfairly treated. Developing an awareness of the problems many of them are currently facing will help employers achieve a positive outcome when business activities resume. (See below)

* **Fear**/**Anxiety**- Idle employees have plenty of time on their hands to speculate and obsess about their situations that may create fear and anxiety. **Fear** is caused by perceived threat or danger, which initially causes physiological changes that result in behavioral changes. **Anxiety** creates excessive tension and worry that increases blood pressure and may cause debilitating emotional issues to develop.
* **Paranoia-** An irrational and persistent fear.
* **Speculation-** This is the forming of a theory or conjecture without firm evidence which, if left unchecked, may produce exaggerated or skewed viewpoints that can trigger angry outbursts.

To promote a positive and encouraging relationship with their employees both during and after the pandemic, employers should be aware of the following:

* **Communication-** Inform your employees of significant company news that they should know or will affect them directly, such as operational changes, modifications in work routines or schedules...etc.
* **Sincerity-**Employees will appreciate being told the truth, no matter the message.
* **Empathy-**Employers should try to put themselves in the place of their employees. Have patience and be understanding, remembering that they have never experienced anything like COVID-19. Be lenient and flexible when employees make requests that under normal circumstances might be denied.
* **Assurance-**Provide employees with as much positivity as possible. Phrases such as “when we get back in action”, “just like it used to be” and “things will return to work soon” will be helpful for improving employee attitude and morale. Let them know that their feelings of depression and frustration are caused by their lack of activity but will disappear when they resume their usual routines.

Employers have an opportunity to lay the groundwork for a smooth transition when business activities resume by fostering a positive and supportive relationship with their employees now. They will appreciate (and remember) employers who are thoughtful and compassionate by returning to work with a renewed sense of purpose and determination to help their companies succeed.