

COVID Purgatory

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"We were starting to breathe a sigh of relief. Now we're back to panicking."

INTRODUCTION:

Nimbleness and resilience. These are two of the most valuable skills that business and HR leaders developed during COVID. The last few months have put these skills to the test. Our recent conversations with People Leaders have shifted from clear office reopening plans to genuine confusion. Plans have been scrapped, delayed, and dramatically changed. Uncertainty reigns.

The spread of the Delta variant is not only throwing office reopening plans into chaos, but wreaking havoc on school plans as well. It's not yet Labor Day and multiple schools have had to close or move back to hybrid learning. The combination of this operational purgatory and school disruption means leaders must once again re-evaluate policies for all employees and pay heightened attention to working parents and caregivers.

As any parent setting out on a family roadtrip can tell you, you may not know when the meltdown will happen, but you need to be prepared for the inevitable. So, HR leaders, take note! In this guide we will share key considerations that must be addressed as policies are put back in focus.

The Washington Post

“The Delta variant is pushing working moms to their breaking point. It’s up to companies to make sure they don’t burn out.”

Preempt the Problem

Bring clarity to potential issues before they happen. With [schools reopening and increased risks of outbreaks](#), now is a good time to remind your people and managers what your flexible work policies are and how best to use them, especially if you’re returning to the office.

Consider scenarios like:

- What happens if a caregiver is forced to work from home while their team is in the office?
 - How will meetings be conducted?
 - Will at home workers be disadvantaged?
 - How will you combat WFH bias if/when some but not all workers return to the office?
- What if an employee unexpectedly becomes a caregiver for a loved one?

Benefits For The Win

Now is a good time to rethink and refresh your EAP, mental health, childcare, and tutoring benefits. For parents in particular, consider whether they prefer onsite childcare or in-home? You should have plenty of utilization data to guide this analysis.

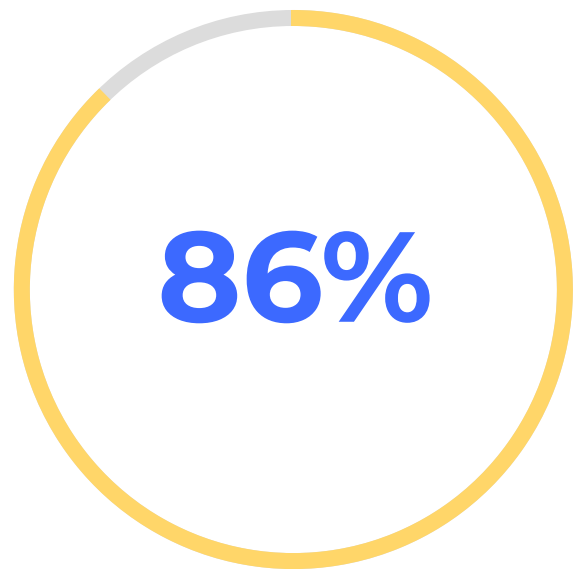
ERGs + Peer Support are Essential

Make use of your ERGs and support those who are running them with resources (both dollars and time). ERGs give you the best opportunity to listen to and learn from your people in a consistent and productive manner. If you don't have a caregiver or family ERG, start by setting up a Slack/Communications channel. It's critical to give your people opportunities to support each other and share resources.

Reviewing Reviews

The labor market is a confusing place right now. On one hand, you have the “great resignation” and on the other a surging “war for talent”. Managing and understanding the drivers of both of these realities is critical. With the year end only a few months away, are you planning to monitor for divergences in performance reviews among those who return to the office vs those who work remotely (by choice or force)? Be especially mindful of the potential for how biases can impact outcomes, especially this year.

Give your people the opportunity to feel seen, valued, and heard. ERGs are critical for talent-to-talent acquisition.



Gen Z applicants plan on participating in a DEI ERG

Managers Under the Microscope:

Managers have relied on a patchwork approach towards navigating the crisis, leading teams, and developing effective systems & workflows. It's been hard, and the data shows managers are struggling too: middle managers were 91% more likely to say they were having trouble working remotely when compared to individuals and senior executives. With hybrid and remote work becoming permanent fixtures, companies must invest in developing their managers' skills, enabling them to lead and thrive in this new environment.

With managers burning out, it's no wonder we're seeing rising employee attrition - especially among working moms. Gallup found that 70% of the variance in employee engagement can be attributed to managers. It's time to admit that your managers have not been trained on how to build high functioning teams while having empathy for team member's distinct personal challenges. There is significant opportunity to support these leaders and see meaningful benefits accrue across the firm.

Consider training topics that cover more advance and nuanced issues like:

- Managing nonlinear workdays
- Remote soft skill training
- Scaling remote teams
- Mental health & remote work
- Remote Allyship & inclusive leadership
- Communication & documentation



The Questions to Ponder:

- 1) Do you have a policy that outlines what your caregivers should do if:
 - a) Schools/daycares shut down due to Covid?
 - b) School is open but their child is required to quarantine at home?
 - c) They have to care for a loved one with COVID?
- 2) Do your people know what steps they have to take to make use of these policies/provisions? Have you communicated them lately?
- 3) Do your managers know the policies? Are they being applied equally across teams and are managers supported in making the best use of these?
- 4) Are your policies/employee handbook easily accessible? More importantly, are they easy to understand?

Thats A Wrap:

COVID's impact on the reopening of offices is still in flux. Every caregiver you employ will face distinct challenges at home, and these circumstances may shift quickly. Ensuring your policies are clearly expressed, benefits supportive, and that you give your people an opportunity to be heard by you is critical.

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