

## MPF FEATURED ARTICLE

### Use Core Values to Strategize Your Post-COVID Return to the Office

*by Jessica Wishart, Rhythm Systems*

Now that vaccinations are in sight for most of us, many leaders whose companies have been mostly remote for the last year are contemplating the best way to get their team members back in the office. CEOs are facing challenging questions about the future of work in their companies and will have to answer to boards, investors, and employees on some key issues. Do we force everyone back full-time in the office? Do we mandate vaccines first? Do we incentivize returning to the office but not require it? What if our work requires travel or other activities that team members may not be fully comfortable with yet? What if we ask everyone to come back and some team members refuse? Are we willing to lose people over this?

Of course, in making decisions around returning to the office, you'll want to consult public health guidelines ([Click here](#) for a helpful resource from OSHA.) and may need to implement new procedures around masking, social distancing, hand washing, temperature checks or daily screeners, etc. to keep team members healthy and feeling secure in the workplace. You may have some change management work to do around encouraging adoption of new protocols or enticing people back into the office. As you look at these decisions and how they will impact your bottom line, don't overlook the impact on your company culture. Any changes you want to make will impact your team, and they are likely experiencing the fallout from this pandemic in various ways and to various degrees. As always, look to your Core Values as a guide and even as a tool for effective change management.

#### Ensure You Aren't Going Against Them

The first step is to ensure whatever decisions you are making regarding expectations for the team are not contradicting your Core Values. For example, our company has a value of "Family Is A Blessing." If our leaders insisted on everyone coming back into the office 9-5, no matter what, those of us still piecing together childcare challenges and remote school schedules or providing care to sick family members would find this mandate flying in the face of our values.

#### Use Them to Communicate Decisions

Once you've thought through the return to work plan through the lens of your Core Values to ensure you're not violating them, you should consider leveraging them when you communicate decisions to the team. For example, if you have a value around exceptional customer service and you decide you need team members back on-site with customers, you can use your values to explain this decision and get buy-in from the team. If part of your "why" for implementing a change in work expectations is to enable the team to better live your shared values, lead with this compelling reason.

## The Managing Partner Forum

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#### **Anchor Back to Them When Addressing Issues that Arise**

To use another Rhythm Systems example, we have a Core Value around addressing conflict before it escalates: No TDC (thinly disguised contempt). If anyone on the team is uncomfortable with our back-to-the-office plans, we are expected to speak up early and address concerns head on. If your team members aren't comfortable or don't agree with your plans, use your values to help frame your discussion, create common ground for all involved and seek a mutually satisfying resolution.

As Dan Ciampa put it in a [recent Harvard Business Review article](#), "Decisions that CEOs make over the next few months will set the tone for how work will be done in the future, impacting the relationships employees have formed and their emotional connection with the company. They should be made carefully." Using your Core Values to help you make decisions that impact your company culture is a good way to ensure you've carefully considered not only the facts, figures and data involved but also the people, relationships and underlying values that matter to you.