3 strategies employers can utilize when reopening their offices post-COVID

Employee Benefits News | By Rob LaHayne | 01-11-21

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In the wake of a global pandemic, 2020 has had an immense impact on all of us. As we enter the new year, it will be crucial for employers to take note of the many shifts in employees' interests and needs.

Getting employees back to the office safely is no small task. While some are in the midst of planning for returning to the office, it's important to keep in mind that it is never too late to get a strategy in place. In fact, given that 49% of respondents to a recent survey have not felt supported by their employer during the pandemic, this may be the last chance for some businesses to demonstrate to employees that they are prioritizing their health and safety.

Here are three best practices employers should keep in mind when thinking about and ultimately bringing their employees back to the office:

1. The right resources

While most employers are envisioning daily symptom monitoring (86.8%) and temperature checks in the office (57.9%) as a part of their **return-to-office strategy**, many haven't yet implemented anything. While it's one thing to set a goal, expectations cannot be met without the right tools and resources. While we are in the early stages of vaccine distribution and many employees remain remote, employers have a window of opportunity to test drive screening tools to determine which would work best for their office environment. Employers should also use this time to determine what they will need to make the office safe. This can include glass partitions, a bigger office space or something else entirely, it's important to map out exactly what is needed.

2. Invest in testing

While we wait for enough Americans to receive the vaccine for us to safely re-engage with society again, testing is the most effective way of preventing spread in the workplace. Any employer that is serious about re-opening safely should strongly consider a strategy for regularly testing their employees. Many employers have already made testing a part of their return-to-work protocol, and there are resources available for those who wish to do so, but don't know where to start. For example, the NIH recently released a tool to help businesses determine costs associated with testing their population enough to safely re-open.

3. Communicate and listen

Employers looking to re-open their doors need to communicate with their employees. It is imperative right now that **employees' safety needs** are met. By communicating a formal plan to employees and being open to suggestions, employers are able to both improve their protocols and make sure their employees' needs are met. The fact is, we're all going through this for the first time together. Plans will change and evolve as new developments, technologies, and solutions arise.

Employers who have effective bi-directional communication strategies will be the ones best

equipped to safely re-open. A thorough employee handbook can be extremely helpful as a guide for what employees can expect when the physical office reopens. This can include how staff should go about complying with social distancing, symptom monitoring or other guidelines, so there is no confusion when the day comes to re-open the doors.

Bringing it all together

It's no secret that many of us have high hopes for 2021 after going through an unprecedented time. This includes returning to some level of workplace normalcy. Whether employers are planning to bring employees back to work or keep them remote for the time being, it's always smart to have a plan in place, keeping employee safety top of mind. Both employers and employees have adapted to the constant change 2020 brought, and organizations will soon see that they will be successful in supporting their workforce by incorporating what they have learned into their return to work plans.