Returning To Work: Navigating COVID-19 Challenges During Re-opening
June 8, 2021
Meeting Summary

Speakers (slides with details available online)
- Sally Kraft: Spoke about the toll of COVID-19 and the efficacy of masks, social distancing, and vaccines in reducing COVID related harm.
- Rudy Fedrizzi: Provided Vermont, New Hampshire and national resources for information and guidance on COVID-19 and COVID-19 safety procedures for businesses, including for different industries. Included resources to host vaccination clinics.
- Beth Rattigan: Provided guidance to employers on legal considerations related to vaccination, masking and reasonable accommodation.

Key Business Challenge/Question

Mascoma Bank (Melissa Carlson)
380 employees. 28 branches in NH and VT

Question:
- **How do you maintain a strong culture and mitigated concerns about fairness and flexibility with people working on both on-site/remote/hybrid teams**? Transitioning to hybrid work model on Sept 1 and anticipate
  - Onsite 40%
  - Remote 10-20% (have people all over the country)
  - Hybrid (40-50%)

Clarifying questions:
- Is it the employers decision or employee decision?
  - It is based on roles. Taking roles into account, then it is up to the employee to work with the manager to see what works best for the employee. Pre-pandemic we were running out of space. Now we have more room to work with. Retention rates are better. Seeing positives. Bank is doing well both operationally and financially.
- What percent working remotely past year:
  - On average, 65% (non-retail jobs)
- What are you doing to support supervisors in managing remote staff?
  - Coaching and management development programs focused on training supervisors
- Do some people resent others working remotely?
  - Emphasizing fairness and transparency and basing decisions on the type of work rather than individuals
- How do you trust people are actually working?
  - Onsite workers may feel they work more consistently

Recommendations for managing onsite, at-home and hybrid work:
- Designate particular days as collaboration days so people come in together
    - Have teams work together to identify days they want to be present and collaborate today
- Focus on transparency. The more we can focus on the "type" of work is key. And making sure the managers have flexibility in managing employees. Teaching everyone how to use new ways of collaborating, Jira, confluence, and other tools we haven't used before.
- Note different groups of workers will have different costs associated with their work site.
    - Need to consider costs of commuting and costs of at-home work office and compensate appropriately.
- Adjust compensation packages to location of workers
    - Consider market-based pay based on where the person is living.
    - Note, and accommodate, different taxation issues as appropriate.
- Incentivize being at work, especially when off-site people come into work
    - Make it a positive experience for all
    - Utilize the time together optimally
    - Accommodate new ways of working together across work locations.
    - Create a place people want to come into – nice, hip, good snacks etc.
- Reduction of carbon emissions needs to be considered a benefit of at homework.
- Be aware that there may not always be a match of position and work preference, so may be helpful to instill into the culture that everyone matters and note that people have different feelings.
    - Some can't wait to return to onsite but could work at home.
    - Others never want to come back but need to.
- Study the impact of different works sites, collect data.
    - Note Mascoma Bank will be adding a measure to their employee engagement and satisfaction questionaire about work structure (onsite, at home, hybrid) so they can assess differences in other variables.
- We are "better together" no matter how we are working. We are always better together and let's accommodate new ways of working TOGETHER.
- Data very important – what classification do employees fall into and how healthy is the culture.

Hanover Co-op (Lori Hildbrand)
375 employees. 75% customer facing. 8 locations (4 grocery stores, 2 auto services, 1 commercial kitchen, 1 central office).

Question: How to restructure COVID policies while upholding our obligation to protect the health and safety of our employees and communities we serve. As examples: How do we balance the request of our members to drop the mask requirements for those who are vaccinated. Do we still require our employees to wear a face coverings?

Clarifying questions:
- Do you have data on vaccination rates of employees?
  - Yes but we are below where we would like to be.
  - We ask employees to share vaccination cards. Keep them confidential (2 people have access to info). Many decline.

Recommendations
- Weigh in on the side of safety. Note: Town of Hanover will continue to ask everyone to wear masks indoors since they cannot be sure everyone is vaccinated.
  - Urging businesses in town to adopt this as well.
- Consider incentivizing vaccination rates among both employees and customers.
  - Coop has learning center for food and public health officials are turning to this type of setting to see how they are managing.
  - COVID is not going away. This is not safe vs unsafe – it is a spectrum. Some employees and customers are going to want to wear a mask ongoing. We should create a culture where that is OK.
  - Eg Stipends or benefits for employees and "free tomato" for customers who can show a vaccine card
  - Hand posters with stories about why people got vaccinated.
- Consider setting up a vaccine clinic at your site which may up the rate of vaccination
  - Bringing it to people may tip them into getting vaccinated. There is a range of thinking about vaccination, not black and white.
  - Consider providing a benchmark vaccination rate at which masks may be dropped.
  - Hypertherm has removed the mask requirement for vaccinated people in their site (honor system).
  - Many vaccination sites advertise which vaccine they are giving on which dates. Pfizer and Moderna are mRNA vaccines and they did not have this complication. If you turn down J&J, most sites will offer an alternative. Most sites are offering as many options as possible.
- Note that COVID is expected to become a chronic presence at some level, not going away, so policies may need to be based on current and changing conditions..
  - Consider different rules at different locations based on local vaccinations rates, rates of transmission and % positive test.
  - Some people will always want to wear masks due to both COVID and other health benefits.

Twin Pines Housing (Andrew Winter)

564 rental units at 24 properties, 56 shared ownership properties. 25 member staff leasing rent collections, maintenance, services

Question: How do we re-open common areas of properties given the differing guidance and restrictions from state and local governments? Would like to have a consistent policy across properties.

Clarifying questions:
- Do staff move between properties?
  - Yes, many staff work on different properties, but majority are in the office most of the time.
  - We have high rates of vaccination. People can be in their own offices without masks, but in common areas they need masks.

Recommendations
- Important to think about the fact that there may be concerns long-term. So consider factoring plans if COVID flares again or winter requires more restrictions.
- Use the local regulations as the baseline. Then consider what you wish to do in addition to that.
  - Consider the transmissions rate, vaccination rates, % positive testing in your particular community and key your actions to those.
  - Note some companies have defined policies re: masks, social distancing, work from home, screening etc based on specific community measures related to COVID, a sort of sliding scale dictating safety steps depending on local conditions.
- Note that even vaccinated people can get COVID-19 and anyone who develops those symptoms need to be tested, isolated and treated.
- Recognize that there may be positive cases that disrupt the workplace. There is a need for ongoing support for businesses who are affected.
- Note that children > age 12 are not vaccinated which is another factor that needs to be factored into planning.
- Aim for a culture that people mask up and/or stay home when they don't feel well because they really care. We saw almost no colds or flu last year.
  - Some people can stay home when sick, but for many workers this is not an option?
    - How can employers support this?
    - Some companies have given additional sick time.
  - Consider promoting continuation of wearing of masks with or without COVID.
  - Putting out positive literature and information out to people about vaccinations, consider promoting mask wearing.
- Employers often say, "if you feel ill stay home" but not realistic for many employees? As employers, how can we support this? Response: supporting employees with additional sick time for COVID.

  SUMMARY:
  - Cannot over communicate
  - No surprises
  - Support managers as they move to hybrid
  - Planning and communication is key