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Hi-ho, it's back to the office we go

Although the delta variant has caused some employers to postpone planned returns to in-person work, with some companies now planning reentry as late as January 2022, many of us are already adjusting to life back at the office—and that's easier said than done. Once you've been told to head back to your workspace, how can you make sure returning to the office is a safe and even enjoyable experience?

Clean up and update your space

See if you can arrange to visit your workspace ahead of your planned return date—perhaps on a weekend or during the evening. No one left the office in March 2020 thinking it would be more than a year later before they returned. It will feel less surreal to return to the office if you've tossed your 2020 calendar, pitched any lingering snacks, and removed dead plants. Consider bringing in new photos or redecorating your workspace to freshen up your environment and make it an enjoyable place to spend time.

Familiarize yourself with safety precautions

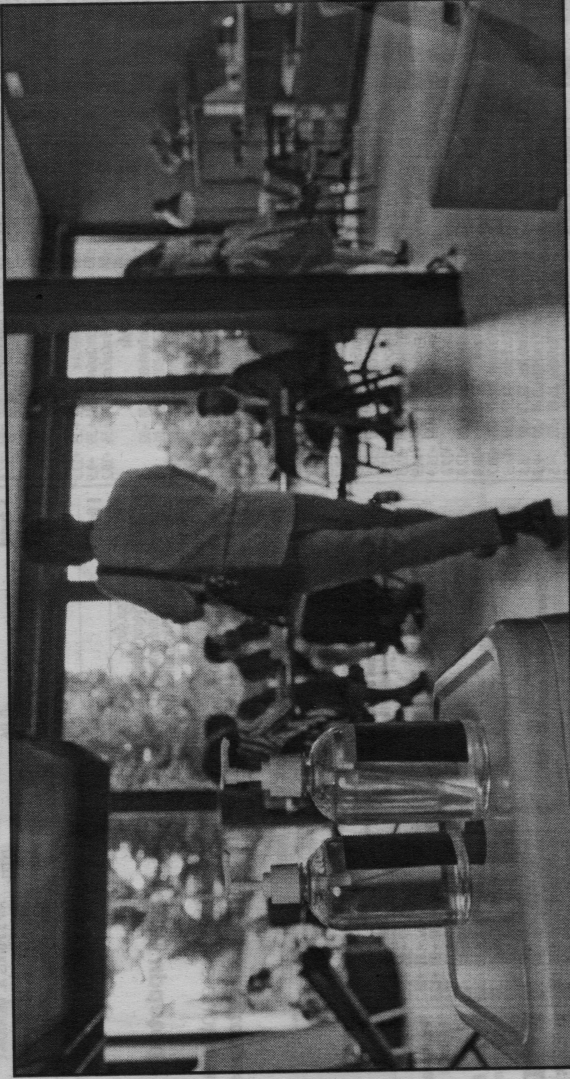
How safe you feel returning to in-person work is a matter of personal risk tolerance. First, you'll want to find out what precautions your company is requiring. Does a local government authority require masking, or does your employer? Will hand sanitizer be provided? Have workspaces been spread out to ensure social distancing? Will meetings take place in person or on Zoom? These are all questions to cover with HR. Then, consider what additional precautions you'd like to take. For instance, will you feel more comfortable wearing a KN95 mask? Do you feel comfortable eating in the employee cafeteria, or are you allowed to eat at your desk?

Get back into a routine

Admit it: Many of us got into some questionable habits when WFH first started. The couch/your bed/the fridge is always handy. Perhaps you're rolling out of bed two minutes before your first meeting and not turning your camera on. Maybe you're taking a cat nap at lunchtime. If you've picked up a habit that wouldn't be acceptable at the office, break it before you head back to in-person work. It's akin to having your school-age child start going to bed earlier a few weeks before school starts.

Make commuting a time for you

One of the bright spots of remote work during the pandemic was the lack of commute. Not only was it beneficial to the environment, but it also opened up a sizable chunk of the day for exercising, gardening, hobbies, etc. Try now to make your return to commuting an enjoyable transition between work and home. Whether it's listening to podcasts and audiobooks, or perhaps learning a new language, find a way to make commuting something you anticipate instead of considering it wasted time.



Take the best of WFH with you

Many employers are not requiring workers to return to the office five days a week. Now that we've proven we can all be productive from home, the barriers to remote work are gone in many instances. Explore whether you can adopt a hybrid schedule in which you work in the office part of the week and from home the others.

Reach out to your EAP if you need to talk

Returning to the office is a transition just like anything else. Your company's employee assistance program (EAP) is made for times like this. Generally, an EAP program allows an employee to confidentially access counseling sessions at no personal cost for a set period. If the stress of return-to-work gets to be too much, your EAP can be an excellent resource.

Know that the Great Resignation is a real phenomenon

After such a seismic shift in corporate culture, many employees are taking times to reconsider what work means to them. Experts have dubbed this trend "The Great Resignation," and you might decide to be a part of it. The workplace you left in March 2020 doesn't exist anymore, and the new version may not be the right fit for you.

One thing is certain: You are not the only person apprehensive about returning to the office. The past year-and-a-half-plus has been exhausting and taxing, and it's normal to have some jitters.

This special advertising section was prepared by independent writer Kate Johanns. The production of this section did not involve the news or editorial staff of The Washington Post.