

Return to Office Conversation & Coaching Support *For People Leaders*

About this document

As our organization transitions through Return to Office, your team's success will be impacted by the support you provide. And much of that support will come in the form of simple but meaningful conversations.

This brief guide will help you prepare for those conversations as you:



- Consider your own experiences and self-awareness
- Recognize that not everyone experiences this situation the same way
- Plan out conversations with your team members

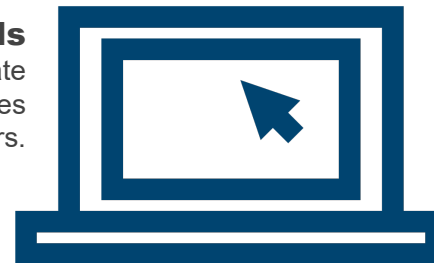
Leader Resources

Topics to think about during this transition

- ❑ [Leading in Difficult Times](#)
A library of resources that help you lean into CLL practices as you lead in difficult times
- ❑ [Team Performance Model Practice Guide](#)
Some teams may need to step back, think about what stage they're in, and respond accordingly
- ❑ [Thriving in Times of Change eBook](#)
Help yourself and others change how you think about and respond to change
- ❑ [How to Be an Inclusive Virtual Team \(Infusion Series\)](#)
If your team is all or part virtual, it adds an extra layer of potential bias you need to think about
- ❑ [How to Lead a Team That is Both Virtual and in the Office](#)
With a few best practices in place, relationships and work on this team can thrive
- ❑ [Succeeding in a Virtual Team Learning Pathway](#)
Best practices and mindsets for making a virtual team work
- ❑ [The Science Behind Making the Return to Workplace Decision](#)
Background information on the value of returning to the office and the factors in that decision

Leader Support Materials

Click here for the most up-to-date list of Return to Office resources available to leaders.





Your Self-Awareness

The foundation of your leadership shadow

Your team has probably faced some interesting challenges lately and more may lie ahead. Perhaps all your employees are returning to the office right away, or perhaps only some will return. Maybe your team is at different stages of Return to Office, and maybe some or all your team members are permanent telecommuters. Whatever this transition looks like for your team, here's the first question you need to ask yourself:

How am *I* doing? Where am *I* at in this journey?

Self-Management is the first practice in every CLL Library. Before you can lead and engage others, you need to understand yourself. Your [leadership shadow](#) is more visible now during these uncertain and turbulent times. What does that shadow look like? How are you amplifying it? If you are aware of your own feelings about the current situation, you will be more successful in supporting your team as they navigate it.



Spend a few minutes taking the simple assessment on page 4 and reflect on your responses.



Then review the Return to Office stories on page 5 and consider which individual you relate to the most.

Return-to-Office Self-Assessment

Indicate on each scale how the current situation impacts you

My energy level these days is...



Low



High

Talking about COVID-19...



Makes it worse for me



Makes it better for me

Home/relationship dynamics currently impact my work...



Less than usual



More than usual

Returning to the office (or continuing to work from home)...



Makes me relieved



Makes me anxious

Right now I worry about my health or the health of those I care about...



Rarely



Constantly

Return-to-Office Stories

How are you experiencing this situation? How are those around you?

Mamtha



Mamtha—Conflicted about RTO

Thinking – This RTO plan seems complicated

Feeling – I’m conflicted about what is the best plan for me personally and professionally

Saying – Is it my decision or my leader’s?

Doing – Talking with my family and friends about how UHC is handling RTO to see how it compares with other organizations

Juan



Juan—Ready to RTO

Thinking – I am ready to return to the office

Feeling – A sense of relief that RTO is happening soon

Saying – I can’t wait to see my teammates and have a dedicated workspace

Doing – I’m counting down the days to RTO

Robert



Robert—Won’t RTO*

Thinking – I hope I don’t get discriminated against

Feeling – I’m uncomfortable with others knowing I’m “high risk” and/or wondering why I’m not in the office

Saying – I hope I can keep my job

Doing – I’m having sleepless nights

Maria



Maria—Not ready to RTO

Thinking – I do not want to return to the office

Feeling – I’m afraid and concerned

Saying – How am I going to balance my personal and professional responsibilities if I RTO?

Doing – Trying to line up a day care solution for my kids

*Another individual might not RTO because they work from home full time. What will their experience be like?



Your Self-Awareness

The foundation of your leadership shadow

What insights about your perspective did you gain from the assessment? How does where you fall on those scales impact how you show up at work and your ability to lead and engage with others?

Which individual in the stories did you relate to most? If you wrote your own story, what would it look like? What are you thinking, feeling, saying, or doing?

Now think of it in terms of how you show up to your team. How does the current situation impact your leadership shadow? What are you doing to take care of yourself so you can put your best foot forward?

Here are a few ways you can amplify your leadership shadow today:

- Preview with your team the preparations in place, including the items in the welcome kit and the information in [this video](#).
- Encourage your team members to leverage the learning sessions, podcasts, and other resources available to them.
- If you're already back in the office, attend team meetings and describe your experience in coming back and what the office looks like.
- If possible, plan to greet team members when they return so they aren't just coming into an empty cubicle and starting their workday.



Managing Individuals Differently

Approach every person with empathy

Now that you've taken time to think through your readiness, turn your attention to your team. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted everyone. But even though this is a shared situation, it's important to recognize that **everyone is experiencing it differently**. A simple concept, perhaps, but easily forgotten as our biases take over and we see things only from our singular perspective.

Once you recognize this important truth, it's easier to **have empathy and lead with compassion**—the type of servant leadership that really makes a difference in moments like this and many others.

Take another look at your self-assessment and the Return to Office stories. Consider the very likely possibility that everyone on your team would fill out that assessment differently. They would relate to or tell a story that is unique to them. **How would these diverse experiences and perspectives make a difference in your team dynamics or how people come across at work?**

Your ability to empathize and flex your approach to your team's needs will impact their success in Return to Office. Flexing your approach requires you to be open to learning how others feel and understanding their unique experience in this situation.

COMMON LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

The concepts you're exploring here align perfectly with the [CLL](#) practice of [Managing Individuals Differently](#). You can find a recorded learning session on this topic [here](#).



Managing Individuals Differently

It's time to talk

Once you recognize that not everyone on your team is experiencing this situation in the same way, it's time to sit down in 1:1 conversations with each team member. Start from a place of empathy and compassion. Seek to understand their needs and determine ways that you can support them. These conversations can make a significant difference in how your team moves forward.



Use the coaching guide on page 9 as an aid to prepare for or conduct those conversations.

Recognize that this shouldn't be just one conversation, but rather an ongoing series of conversations with each team member. Your opportunity is to help each individual on their journey through this transition, regardless of how they are experiencing it.

How might you regularly check in with your team? How might you revisit concerns or topics after allowing them time to process and make incremental changes? How can you better use the [resources](#) available to you to educate and support over time?

Every employee should feel supported in bringing their best self to work as we continue pursuing our UnitedHealth Group mission. Engaging in these conversations is the best way for that to happen for your team.

Managing Individuals Differently

Have a conversation that allows you to show empathy and understand their need

Listen to Learn

The goal of this conversation is to hear and learn the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of a person in order to form a basis of understanding of their point of view.

Points to remember:

- Being a good listener is vital to building trust. Be sure to **Be Here Now**.
- Listening can be difficult because of the emotions you may encounter.
- Stand in their shoes. Avoid judgment.
- Showing empathy for others can help you connect on a more personal level in order to better understand.

Ask to Understand

Asking questions in a conversation helps to encourage dialogue, clarify what you heard and bring understanding.

Points to remember:

- Seek to understand the specifics of a concern or challenge.
- Ask open-ended questions to encourage conversation (questions that begin with what, how, when, tell me...)
- Ask questions that will uncover what they are thinking, feeling and concerned about—not just the facts.

Questions to ask:

- What do you **think** about that?
- How does that make you **feel**?
- What else are you **concerned** about?

Offer Support

Supporting your team members is one of the most important roles as a leader. That effort starts with compassion.

Points to remember:

- Being vulnerable and sharing your own personal concerns and feelings can strengthen trust and relationships with your team members.
- Instill confidence in your support by sharing that you are in this together and working toward the same goal of seeing them succeed in this challenge.
- If you can't support this person with all their challenges, focus on those areas where you *can* offer support.

Questions to ask:

- What other options have you considered?
- What support do you need to get through this?
- What can I do to help you?
- What can we do as a team to support you?