

The Great Return: Employers Calling for Return to Office

by **King White**, on Jul 7, 2023 8:01:59 AM

As the world emerges from the grips of a global pandemic, employers worldwide are grappling with an important question: Should employees return to the office? While remote work gained popularity during the COVID-19 crisis and crushed the office real estate market, many employers are now urging their workforce to physically return to the office. In this blog, we explore why employers want employees to return to the office and examine the potential benefits and challenges associated with this shift.

Rebuilding workplace culture

One significant reason employers are keen to bring employees back to the office is the desire to rebuild and strengthen workplace culture. Offices serve as hubs for collaboration, innovation and social interactions, all of which play a vital role in fostering a cohesive and vibrant work environment. Face-to-face interactions promote stronger relationships among team members, enhancing trust, teamwork and camaraderie. Employers believe that by returning to the office, employees will benefit from the synergy that arises from working alongside their colleagues.

Enhancing collaboration and creativity

While technology has made remote collaboration possible, many employers argue that the spontaneity and creativity fostered through in-person interactions are difficult to replicate virtually. Casual conversations around the water cooler, brainstorming sessions and improv

collaborations often lead to innovative ideas and problem-solving. Employers believe that these organic interactions are more likely to occur in a physical office space, driving creativity and innovation within their teams.

Improving communication and productivity

Effective communication is crucial for any successful organization. Although video conferencing and instant messaging tools have enabled remote communication, they can sometimes fall short in conveying nonverbal cues and building strong personal connections. Employers argue that being physically present in the office allows for clearer and more nuanced communication, reducing misunderstandings and enhancing productivity. The ability to have real-time discussions, receive immediate feedback and resolve issues promptly can significantly impact workflow efficiency.

Fostering mentorship and professional development

For many employees, the office environment is a valuable space for mentorship and professional growth. Being in close proximity to experienced colleagues and leaders provides opportunities for informal learning, mentorship and professional development. Employers emphasize that returning to the office allows younger or less-experienced employees to benefit from the wisdom and guidance of more seasoned team members. Face-to-face interactions facilitate knowledge-sharing and mentorship, enabling individuals to learn and grow within their roles.

Challenges and considerations

While employers see several advantages in having employees return to the office, it is important to acknowledge the challenges and consider the diverse needs of employees:

- **Work-life balance and flexibility:** Many employees have embraced remote work for the flexibility it offers. Employers must strike a balance between the desire for in-person collaboration and the need for a healthy work-life balance. Hybrid work models that allow for a mix of remote and in-office work can help address these concerns.



- **Commute and environmental impact:** Returning to the office means employees may have to deal with commuting, which can impact their well-being and contribute to environmental issues. Employers should explore sustainable transportation options and consider flexible work schedules to mitigate these concerns.
- **Health and safety:** The ongoing pandemic has heightened awareness about health and safety. Employers must prioritize the well-being of their employees by implementing robust health protocols, ensuring adequate ventilation and maintaining a clean and sanitized work environment.

Return-to-office policies at some of the largest employers

Based on research by [Business Insider](#), the following is a summary of the most recent return-to-office mandates at some of the largest employers:

- **Amazon** CEO Andy Jassy said he and Amazon's leadership team decided to implement in-person work three days a week beginning in May as they believed it would strengthen the company's culture. In response, thousands of Amazon employees joined a Slack channel to share their thoughts with some organizing to file a petition against the change, Eugene Kim reported.
- **Apple** senior leaders told workers in August that they had to return to the office at least three days a week in what CEO Tim Cook said was a decision to restore "in-person collaboration." Employees issued a petition shortly after the announcement, arguing that staffers can do "exceptional work" from home.
- **Chipotle** now requires that corporate workers work in the office four days a week, according to Bloomberg. The fast-casual chain had been requiring three days a week in the office and made the change in June.
- **Citigroup** required its vaccinated employees across the U.S. to return to the office for at least two days a week in March 2022, according to an internal memo obtained by Reuters.



- **Disney** CEO Bob Iger told workers back in March that Disney staff members working “in a hybrid fashion” needed to return to Disney’s offices four days a week. Some employees are fighting that mandate.
- **Goldman Sachs** CEO David Solomon told Fortune in March 2022 that the company was asking employees to return to the office five days a week but as of January 2023 many still weren’t showing up, Fortune reported.
- **Google** employees in the San Francisco Bay Area and “several other U.S. locations” were told to return to the office for at least three days a week by April 2022.
- **IBM** CEO Arvind Krishna has encouraged workers to return to the office for three days a week but hasn’t mandated a return. In May he told Bloomberg that employees’ careers could suffer if they work from home, saying he thought remote workers may struggle to get promotions.
- **JPMorgan** CEO Jamie Dimon pushed back on remote work in April, according to Yahoo Finance. The company has been collecting data on staff activity, including tracking attendance. In a move that could shape the rest of Wall Street’s return-to-office rules, the bank recently said it will mandate that all managing directors come to the office five days a week.
- **Meta** has stopped offering remote work when it lists new jobs, at least for now. It’s also announced that employees will be required to head into the office three days a week starting in September.
- **Salesforce** has an updated “draft” return-to-office policy that would require three days a week in the office for some employees and four days a week for employees in “customer-facing” roles. Engineers would be required to work from the office 10 days per quarter, down from 20 in the initial draft, which was updated based on employee feedback.
- **Snap** employees were working at least four days a week in the office as of February 2023, a person familiar with the plans told Insider. This represents a shift from the company’s former policy, which was “remote first” and allowed employees to work from home or elsewhere.
- **Starbucks** employees within commuting distance were required to return to the office at least three days a week as of January 31. Starbucks employees, however, have signed a

open letter protesting the company's return-to-office mandate.

- **Twitter** CEO Elon Musk told employees in November 2022 that not showing up to an office when they're able to was the same as a resignation, The Verge reported. Musk also told staffers in an email that remote work was no longer allowed and that employees were expected to be in the office for at least 40 hours a week unless given explicit approval to work elsewhere.
- **Uber** CEO Dara Khosrowshahi told employees in a memo obtained by Insider that beginning in April 2022, Uber staffers in 35 of the company's locations were required to return to the office at least half the time. He added that on other days staffers were allowed to work remotely and that some could be entirely remote managerial clearance.

Conclusion

The decision to return to the office is a complex one, and employers must carefully weigh the benefits against the challenges. While employers seek to rebuild workplace culture, enhance collaboration and foster professional growth, they must also be mindful of the changing dynamics and preferences of their employees. Hybrid work models that blend remote and in-office work may provide a flexible solution that satisfies both parties. Ultimately, finding the right balance is crucial for creating a productive and supportive work environment in the post-pandemic world.

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