

AN EMPLOYEE'S GUIDE TO RETURNING FROM FURLOUGH LEAVE

As the lockdown continues to gradually ease over the coming months and the government slowly reduces their contribution to the cost of the furlough scheme, employers will find themselves in the position of having to pay the outstanding balance in order to validate their employees' furlough leave, and ensure they are still being paid 80% of their wages until the scheme ends entirely at the end of October. It is therefore likely that employers will begin to gradually bring many people back from furlough leave over the coming weeks and months to support their organisation as they navigate the new era of work.

PREPARE NOW TO BEAT THE 'BACK TO WORK' NERVES

If you are preparing to come to the end of furlough leave, you may be keen to return to work and get back into a routine, whilst also experiencing some apprehension and anxiety at resuming your role after your time away.

It's perfectly natural to feel this way, so to help alleviate any worries you have, we have listed steps for breaking down some of the considerations of heading back to work, and how you can get back into the rhythm of your working life as smoothly as possible.

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10 STEPS TO SMOOTHLY RETURN FROM FURLOUGH LEAVE

1 Reassess your working setup and how it might need adapting: If you were placed on furlough at the start of the lockdown, or when the mass transition to home working took place, it may be that you need to make some modifications to your working setup. If, to start with, you find yourself working from home, at least on a part-time basis, ask yourself if you have the equipment you require to do your job to the best of your ability, and a safe and secure space in which to work.

If you are returning to the workplace and have any health and safety concerns or questions about your working environment, for example regarding social distancing measures, be sure to raise these with your manager as soon as possible in order to secure the clarification required.

2 Communicate expectations with your employer: It may be that in coming back to work after being on furlough you are faced with conflicting priorities, such as caring for dependants. It is also possible that you, or someone in your household, may have been placed on the 'shielded list' and consequently, for health reasons, you might need to work remotely for the foreseeable future if possible.

It is important that if you have these concerns you should make your employer aware of these sooner rather than later - this will increase the likelihood of them being able to accommodate your request and support you as much as they can.

3 Take time to familiarise yourself with new projects and tools: On returning to work you may unsurprisingly be feeling a little 'out of the loop' on various projects that may have been progressed whilst you were away. Rather than allowing yourself to become too overwhelmed, spend your first couple of days back at work familiarising yourself with these projects, whether that entails joining conference calls as a passive listener, or reading through communication chains or project plans.

Take the time also to do some test runs with any new tools or technology that your organisation may have adopted in your absence – these might include video conferencing tools such as Microsoft Teams, or any more industry-specific software that enables you to do your job on a remote basis.

4 Prepare yourself for more agile working practices: You may be returning from furlough to a working model that's vastly different from the one you left. It may be that you didn't work during the mass transition to remote working that many of us have seen, or that you went on leave right in the middle of it.

The new and evolving era of work is likely to involve many of us working to agile or 'hybrid' schedules for the foreseeable future, with some based in the workplace, and others at home, so you will need to ensure that you're open to varied methods of communication with your teams – depending on their schedules and locations – to keep projects tracking along efficiently.

Key areas where you might need to adapt your working practices include:

- **Digital communication:** If some of your team are working remotely, and others on-site, staying in touch using different technologies and making the most productive use of these will be key.
- **Agile project management:** A flexible approach to project management that allows teams to break down large projects into smaller, more achievable tasks. For those working on a more agile, flexible basis, approaching projects in this way allows work to be delivered more manageably and adaptably.

5 Adhere to health and safety rules: There can be no doubt that whilst we continue to live with the reality of Covid-19, the spotlight on health and safety will remain in place on a continuous basis. If you are returning to the workplace, it's imperative that you take the time to familiarise yourself with any health and safety policies your organisation has put in place, such as limits on meeting numbers, and that you also adhere to social distancing measures.

6 Assess areas where you might need to upskill: The skills you need to perform optimally at your job may have evolved in the time you were on leave in response to the way the Covid-19 crisis has reshaped the working landscape.

The crisis has highlighted the importance of certain key soft skills, as well as a willingness to adapt to change. According to our recently published [Market Insights Report](#), which provided insights from a survey of over 16,000 professionals and employers, the soft skills employers need most are excellent communication, problem-solving capabilities and flexibility. Showing you can demonstrate these skills and working to improve on them will be invaluable to succeeding professionally as your organisation navigates the new era of work.

7 Give yourself time to reintegrate with your team: When returning from furlough you may find that it takes some time for your team to adjust as you resume your role. Take your time reassuming your previous responsibilities and use the initial few days as an opportunity to pencil in calls or meetings with your colleagues so that they can bring you up to speed on what has taken place whilst you were on leave.

Take the time also to socialise with colleagues you may not have had the chance to speak to properly for a while, even if you can only do so on a remote basis. Pencil in a catch-up or virtual drink on a Friday afternoon – and do your best not to talk about work!

8 Prioritise self-care and continue to maintain your wellbeing: Returning from furlough leave, particularly if it has been extensive, is a considerable adjustment and it's vital that you prioritise your mental health and wellbeing during this time.

During your initial return to work make sure to take regular breaks and finish on time as often as you possibly can, in order to prevent burnout. If your organisation provides resources such as an employee advisory service or wellbeing resources then also make use of these should you feel you need to. Talk to your employer about signing up to [Hays Thrive](#), which provides a whole library of courses, including wellbeing training, designed to help you during this time.

9 Keep in regular contact with your manager: During your initial return from furlough make sure to keep your manager informed of how you are adjusting, and flag if you are struggling with the workload. To start with, you may also want to speak to them more regularly and perhaps separately from team or group catch-ups to give you a chance to speak openly and honestly about any concerns you might have.

10 Put into action any career plans you may have put in place: If you have used furlough leave as an opportunity for upskilling or professional development, then make sure you're not letting this opportunity go to waste. When you return, ask for a call or meeting with your manager to talk about ways you might be able to apply any newly acquired skills, and if you have taken the time to sketch out a career roadmap then ask to discuss this also, using the opportunity to identify what you want to achieve in the next six months and how you can go about this.