



A MINI GUIDE FOR MANAGERS

# Leading With Care Through the *Return-to-Work*



# Do's and *Don'ts*

BEING A MANAGER OF A WORKING PARENT – ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE THROES OF A BIG LIFE TRANSITION – CAN BE CONFUSING. YOU WANT TO GIVE THEM OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEIR CAREER ADVANCEMENT WHILE EMPATHIZING WITH THE ADDED RESPONSIBILITIES AT HOME.

WE CREATED THIS LIST OF DO'S AND DON'TS JUST FOR YOU. THIS SIMPLE GUIDE WILL HELP YOU COMMUNICATE CLEARLY AND ACTIVELY LISTEN TO THE NEW WORKING PARENT YOU ARE MANAGING.

## Do:

- Ask your working parent about how they are doing and feeling. Often working parents are only asked about their child and the expectation is that it is all joyful – but the reality is that every working parent has different experiences. You will not know unless you ask.
- Ask how you can support the new working parent with their transition. A simple, open-ended question such as “How can I support you?” can go a long way.
- Encourage a clear and open discussion about flexibility and any expectations around work meetings and deliverables you may have. Actively align on priorities with them.
- Ask them if they are interested in new opportunities to develop new skills and advance their career. Unconscious bias often happens to working parents as leaders and managers do not want to pressure them with extra work, but this is also a disservice to their career in the long-run.



# Do's and *Don'ts*

CONTINUED . . .

- Accept no for an answer. It is not easy for most working parents to ask for flexibility, so when they do ask be open to accepting their no and finding alternative paths forward.
- Create opportunities for team/relationship building during office hours. Typically, dinners and drinks are where team bonding and relationship building happens, but this is not always easy for the working parent who must pick up their child from daycare/school or relieve the nanny. Planning a mix of activities that start in and outside of normal work hours makes team bonding time more accessible to working parents.
- Proactively communicate any required travel or offsite meetings you are planning to have so that your working parent has as much time as possible to plan for this.
- Remain focused on results and outcomes, without creating a bias about their personal circumstances. Becoming a new parent often comes with “new normal” for your team members – new schedules, less sleep, new priorities. Remaining focused on desired results will help prevent from over-focus on task management and allow more room for creative ways to find mutually beneficial paths forward under the “new normal.”



# Do's and *Don'ts*

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## **Don't:**

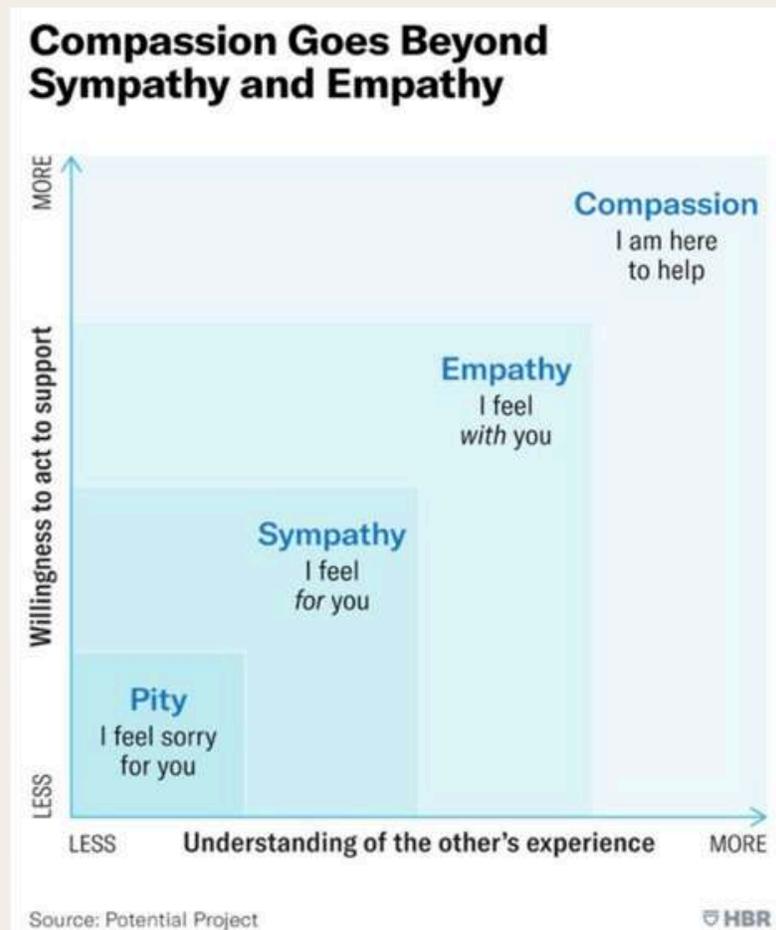
- Assume the new working parent wants to cut back on work, late night meetings or critical career advancing projects. While this assumption might come from a good place, it may not be what the new working parent wants for their career or their family.
- Judge a working parents' choices around childcare or the commitment they are demonstrating to their career. Women in particular have experienced backlash for being "too" career driven when they have childcare and gain an unfair reputation as a bad mother.
- Assume you know what a working parent's needs are even if you are a working parent yourself – everyone has different struggles.
- Be shy about asking your working parent for what you need while asking them what they can commit to.
- Test your working parents' commitment level by imposing inflexible times of meeting. For example, scheduling a weekly team meeting at 5pm when you know the working parent on your team is responsible for picking up their child.

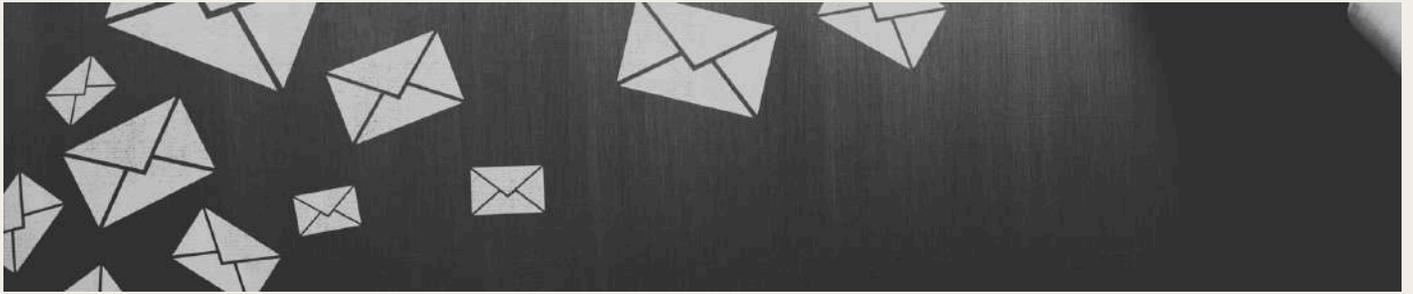


# Do's and Don'ts

CONTINUED...

- Fall into the trap of pitying your working parents when they express a work-life issue like “my child just threw up at daycare.” Empathize and show compassion by asking them questions about how you can support them. Diagram 1 below highlights the differences between Pity, Sympathy, Empathy and Compassion.





# Welcome Back from Parental Leave: Email Example (Personalize as Needed)

WHEN TO SEND: 1 -2 DAYS  
PRIOR TO PARENT'S RETURN  
TO WORK DATE

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Congratulations on the new addition to your family! I'm so glad you were able to spend time at home with your newest family member.

We are all very excited about your upcoming return to work – the entire team missed you during your parental leave. We did our best to keep things organized in your absence and are very much looking forward to your return.

Being a working parent brings its fair share of joyful and challenging moments. I want to reassure you that **[INSERT COMPANY NAME]**, and I as your manager, are committed to supporting you throughout your transition and in your career journey overall. We all understand that it will be an adjustment. In the days to come, I would like to set up time for us to discuss more specifically how we can structure your return-to-work to best support you as you resume work duties and re-engage with the team. Be on the lookout for an invite coming soon.

In the meantime, please let me know if you have any questions or immediate concerns.

Welcome back!

Best regards,

\_\_\_\_\_



# *Welcome Back* from Parental Leave: Set Up a 1:1

ONCE YOU HAVE SHARED THIS FIRST EMAIL WITH YOUR EMPLOYEE, AS A NEXT STEP, SET UP TIME FOR A 1:1 DISCUSSION TO OCCUR WITHIN THE FIRST WEEK BACK FROM LEAVE.

In our experience, best practice would be to schedule this on Day 3 or 4 of the return, to give the employee a day or 2 to settle back in, adjust to their new routines, and be prepared to fully engage in this discussion.

We have learned that many employees returning to work from parental leave have anxiety in three primary areas. It is important that the manager confront these directly and brings a positive / collaborative approach to planning for these with the employee.

- Performance expectations and ability to resume duties
- Career trajectory and impact of having been away on leave, and
- The nuts-and-bolts of how the first weeks back will work, with the need for flex-time, potential for having to handle personal issues during work (everything from pumping to calling daycare)...and of course, the potential for emotional moments.



# Welcome Back from Parental Leave: Set Up a 1:1

**\*NOTE:** *If your employee has already returned from leave and has been back to work for some time, you can and should still set up a 1:1 meeting with the suggested agenda below. This is a great way to pause and align with the working parent on values, vision, goals and priorities – even if they have already been back to work for several weeks or months. It’s an important conversation to have that often gets overlooked and is shown to have tremendous return on time invested.*

This first meeting is critical to setting a positive and supportive tone as the parent makes the transition back to work. Below please find a guide on how to conduct this meeting agenda, including timing and examples of how to talk through each agenda item.

A suggested agenda and communication template for this first meeting are included in the next section.



# *How to* Conduct the First Meeting with the New Working Parent

THIS FIRST MEETING IS CRITICAL TO SETTING A POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE TONE AS THE PARENT MAKES THE TRANSITION BACK TO WORK. THESE NEXT PAGES CONTAIN A GUIDE ON WHAT YOU MIGHT DISCUSS IN THIS MEETING, INCLUDING TIMING AND EXAMPLES OF HOW TO TALK THROUGH EACH AGENDA ITEM.

## START WITH OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS AND ALLOW SPACE TO CATCH UP

It may be tempting to dive right into work-related topics – and that may be what your team member wants! However, it is important to start the conversation by asking a simple and open-ended question to give them space to share how they are feeling and ease into the conversation. Remember to ask how they are doing – and not just the baby! Questions to open can include:

- How are you doing?
- How is the baby doing?
- How are you feeling?
- How can I support you as you make this transition back to work?
- This is your time – how can I make this call helpful for you?



If your team member participated in the Josie program, you can start by asking how it is going and see if there is anything they would like to share. As part of the program, they create 3 visions for themselves: one as a parent, one as a professional, and one overall. If they share their vision statement(s), it is a great way to launch into a conversation about how they would like the next few months to look, and how to prioritize what to focus on.

Here is an example vision:

*“I am a career woman who builds strong relationships and empowers other working moms to stay in the workforce while constantly learning and growing myself.”*

From there, you can ask the returning team member if they have thought about what they would like to prioritize in the coming weeks. This allows them to articulate what is most important to them as they make this transition (e.g., re-assuming people manager responsibilities, leading weekly team calls).



## REDEFINING THE NEW NORMAL & EXPECTATION LEVEL SETTING :

Next, it is important to align early on expectations during this transition period. Everything from schedules, to work priorities, to travel – an open and honest dialogue will help everyone involved – you, the returning parent, and the broader team.

Below are common topics that could surface during the call. You and your team member are responsible for discussing and documenting any agreements made regarding the topics below. A manager's role is to understand, support and discuss what makes sense based on shared values.

- **Flexibility in Working Hours:** *I may need to leave by 3pm every other Friday as my nanny has school. I will be available online at 5pm to answer any emails or client requests if that works for you.*
- **Hybrid Working Request:** *None needed at this time.*
- **Breaks Needed During the Day:** *I will need to take breaks at noon to check in with my nanny and use the lactation room.*
- **Expectations around work travel:** *I can travel but will need at least 2 weeks' notice if possible.*
- **Important Personal Circumstances:** *My partner travels during the week for work so any backup childcare needs would be my responsibility.*
- **Communicating Expectation with Team Members:** *I will let our team know that I won't be available every other Friday between 3-5pm but I will be free from 5-7pm. I will block out my calendar accordingly.*



- **Career Desire:** *I would like to work on getting promoted within the next 18 months and want to have a follow-up conversation to understand what I need to demonstrate to make that happen.*

## UPDATES AND PRIORITIES

Now take some time to share with the team member important updates and team priorities in the coming weeks.

### Important Updates

- **Business Related:** E.g., We are acquiring a small company and I'd like you to help with the integration planning. We have a kickoff meeting next Friday and I have invited you.
- **Team/Personnel Related:** E.g., Sara will be going on maternity leave next month. We are hiring a contractor who will start next week to handle her responsibilities and work with you closely. I am going to a conference in June for a week and have asked Mary to lead the team that week in my place.

### Top 3 Priorities for Next 6 Months (with specific support I want from you):

*E.g.:*

- Execution of DX project
- Hiring and onboarding two open positions
- Kickoff new product development strategy sessions



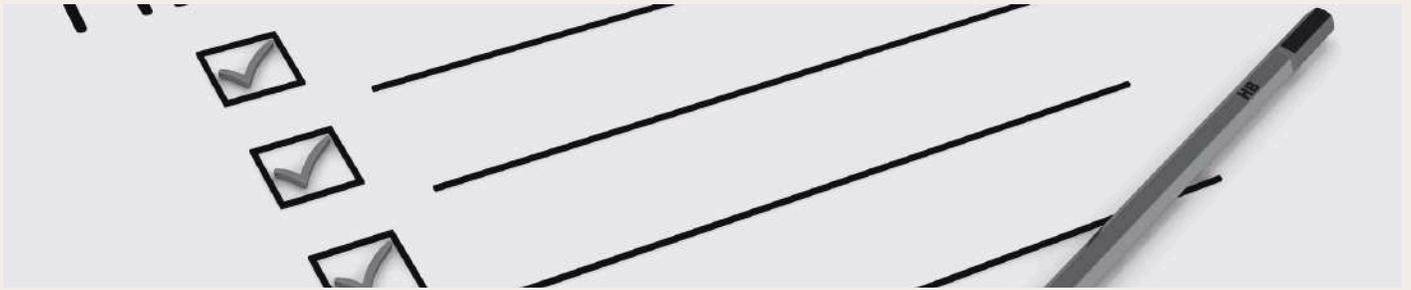
## NEXT STEPS

Use these last few minutes to re-cap any key takeaways from the call and ensure alignment between both parties on any decisions made.

Be clear on owners and next step action items so there is no ambiguity on execution.

## FINAL TIP: SHARED VALUES FRAMEWORK

Navigating conversations with team members going through a life event or transition can be tricky – but are also great opportunities to re-establish trust and deepen the relationship with your employee. A great way to prepare for your first meeting is to recall the company’s values – and use that as a foundation for how you approach the discussion.

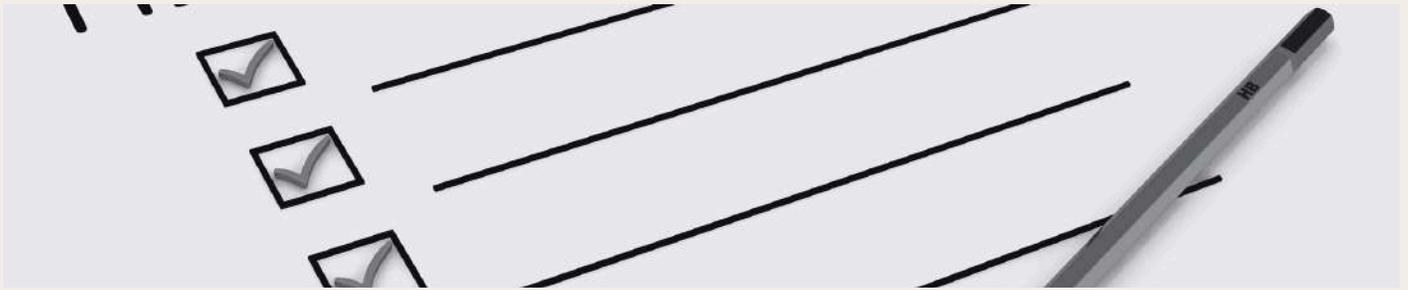


# Post-Return Intentional Check-Ins: 30/60/90 Day Guidance

FOLLOWING THE FIRST FEW WEEKS SURROUNDING THE RETURN-TO-WORK, IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONTINUE INTENTIONAL CHECK-INS WITH YOUR TEAM MEMBER AS THEY ADJUST TO THE RHYTHMS OF THEIR “NEW NORMAL.”

For context, here are a few common occurrences that are associated with baby’s development:

- 3 – 4 months old:
  - Sleep transitions and regressions, which can result in long nights and sleep deprivation for parents
  - If the child is starting Day Care or around other children more, illnesses may become more frequent
- 5 – 6 months old:
  - Babies may still struggle with sleep
  - Children start to become more mobile (crawling, scooting)
- 7 – 12 months old:
  - Baby may start to walk, babble first words
  - Baby starts to eat solid foods



Throughout this time, there are also several regular pediatric checkups required for baby. Given the quickly shifting nature of baby's development and its potential impact on the family, here are some tips for intentional check-ins:

**30-days post return:**

- Simply ask your team member how they are doing and how you can support them. This can go a long way to know that you recognize it is still a big transition period and you are there for them.

**60-days post return:**

- Set up some time to intentionally re-visit the discussion you had when the team member first returned. How are they feeling about that plan? How are they progressing towards the goals and priorities you set together? Where might they need help?

**90-days post return:**

- This may be a more appropriate time to check in on your team member and surface a conversation about longer-term goals and aspirations. Now that they have had a few months to find a rhythm, get back into the swing of things, and focus on short-term goals, see if there is an appetite for a conversation about their longer-term professional development.
- Be sure to celebrate the team member and their accomplishments over the past few months. Partner with them to find ways to continue building on their strengths and motivators that will result in long-term sustainability and success.



# Emotional Regulation Techniques for *You*

## \* Body Scan

Start in a comfortable position with your feet planted firmly on the ground. Beginning at your toes and working your way up, bring awareness to each body part, inhale as you tense that body part, then release the tension as you exhale.

UNPREDICTABILITY FOR A MANAGER AND AN EMPLOYEE IS EQUALLY STRESSFUL. PRACTICING MINDFUL MOMENT EXERCISES CAN HELP BETTER MANAGE THAT STRESS.

## 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 \*

Working backwards from 5, use your senses to list things you notice around you. You might start by listing five things you hear, then four things you see, and so on. There is no "right" order to do this!

## Box Breathing \*

Step 1: Breathe in counting to four slowly. Feel the air enter your lungs.  
Step 2: Hold your breath for 4 seconds.  
Step 3: Slowly exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds. Step 4: Hold at the bottom of your breath for 4 seconds. Repeat.

## \* Gratitude List

Write out or mentally list 3-5 things that you are grateful for or bring you joy. As you list them out, take a moment to visualize each briefly.



# References

WE GET BY WITH A LITTLE  
HELP FROM OUR FRIENDS.  
ER ... SOURCES... FOR  
OUR GUIDEBOOK.

- [The Balance](#): Welcome Back To Work letter and Email Examples
- [The Balance](#): How to Write a Return from Maternity Leave Letter
- [Manage Better](#): Welcome a Co-worker Back from Maternity Leave
- [Harvard Business Review](#): How to Return to Work After Parental Leave
- [Andie & Al](#): How to Recognize Bias Against Working Mothers
- [The Enterprisers Project](#): Be the Boss Working Parents Need Now: 6 Tips
- [Time](#): Men and Women Use Parental Leave Differently. They're Judged for it Differently, Too.

HAVE MORE QUESTIONS?

# Get in touch with team Josie:



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