Navigating safety in the future world of work

As with all safety and health efforts, staying safe in the future world of work is the combined result of employers taking the right steps to systemically reduce risk and employees doing their part to look out for themselves and each other.

The following are some tips on what you can do to keep yourself, your coworkers and your organization safe and healthy as you navigate the changed work environment.

Communication

First and foremost, continue to keep open lines of communication with your team, your supervisor and other coworkers. Whether the future world of work for you is a continuation of an already-reopened work environment, fully remote work or a hybrid of the two, finding effective ways to communicate is critical.

This extends beyond physical safety to include mental health, fatigue and stress, which will require continued attention in the months ahead.

It is also very important to quickly and clearly communicate any particular hazards you identify or concerns you may have with the new work environment.

Engagement

Continue to engage in existing and new safety and health programs. It may seem strange after months of remote work to remember to report hazards in the workplace, complete observation activities or perform other routine safety-related tasks, such as pre-shift safety briefings or toolbox talks.

Remember, these programs were put in place for a reason. Even if your work environment over the past year hasn't required them, your changed one likely will.

Policies and Mitigations

It is likely that your employer will continue to have COVID-19 or infectious disease-related policies in place for a period of time as we transition to a post-pandemic work environment.

This may include physical distancing, masking and sanitation controls that could be seen as frustrating or unnecessary to some in the workforce.

Given the many variables related to the spread of the virus and the uncertainties around herd immunity, it is important to adhere to the policies your employer deems necessary for safe work.

Working Effectively

Your changed workplace may not be perfect day one, and may present both new opportunities and challenges. Be open to:

- Problem solving
- Staying flexible in the face of changes that may come more quickly than usual
- Clearly articulating what is and isn't working to your supervisor and/or leadership

Your organization won't know what it doesn't know, in some respects, until the rubber meets the road. Being ready to take this journey together with your team and organization is half the battle.

Work/Life Balance

Finally, many of us experienced a multitude of challenges with work/life balance over the past year – from watching our children to providing care for our at-risk family members.

As we return to the changed workplace, some of these challenges may subside and some may be magnified. Understanding how these impact our work – and our safety and health – is a long-term factor for success going forward.

Engage with your organization's leadership, including your supervisor and HR team, to understand the available options and resources to help you stay both physically and mentally fit.

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