

What does the new team look like? It's up to you.

We've been living through the pandemic for over a year, but now it seems like there might be an end in sight. Many people are going to return to offices soon, at least in part. Most of us haven't stepped foot in an office building in what feels like forever, while in-person conferences and social events seem like a distant memory. Everyone has Zoom fatigue, but the idea of going back to commuting seems equally as daunting. What is that going to look like?

Times of uncertainty, change and upheaval can provide immense opportunity. Before people settle back into habits and routines, before teams are solidified and structures are set in concrete, there is huge creative potential. As firms begin discussions about coming back to the office, you have the opportunity to foster positive change by joining the conversation and ensuring the return brings with it the fresh energy of a new beginning.

Creating Excitement About the Return

We've all been working in our own little bubbles, trying to survive without that valuable in-person connection for so long. We've adapted, but most people can agree that working alone is rarely the path to success.

Remember working in groups? While working in a team can be time-consuming, it almost always creates a better work product. Teams encourage innovation, collaboration and relationships. Remember those? Relationships? With people?

When talks begin about returning to the office, generate excitement by reminding people about friendships. Firm lunches, happy hours, holiday parties, or even just chatting over coffee and asking after families and hobbies – the social elements of work are fun, but they are also essential, if subtle, elements of productive office dynamics.

Not all interpersonal office dynamics were positive or healthy even before the coronavirus pandemic, though, and the upheaval of the imminent return provides an opportunity to root out [workplace toxicity and negativity](#). Savvy leadership should restructure office environments to foster positive relationships and reduce distracting office politics and interpersonal conflicts.

Destroying Silos and Reshaping Teams

Silos have long been issues in professional service firms of all sizes and specialties. They can be based on office location, practice group or experience. Breaking down those silos to build productive teams has been a long-standing challenge and has only been made harder by the less-than-collaborative work-from-home environment.



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An opportunity is arising now to prevent old silos and walls from going up again. This is the time to bring up any of your creative ideas for a roadmap or plan to reorder the office, break down silos and encourage collaboration in the office.

Consider what worked in the past. What can you do to encourage and promote teamwork? What successes did your groups have that you can recreate and expand on? And what didn't work? Were there challenges in the past that you would like to address now?

Now is the time to (re)build an inclusive and diverse workplace. Make it clear that diversity and inclusion should be high priorities. Have tough conversations. Empower working groups or committees to champion these initiatives. It's easiest to create change in the beginning stages of a new endeavor, rather than once patterns and habits have become firmly entrenched.

A New Beginning and a Fresh Start

There are a lot of unknowns right now, but if you have a plan and lead by example, you'll help inspire your teammates and create excitement around the return to the office. You can shape your office into the collaborative, productive and inclusive environment that everyone wants. We all want to leave the coronavirus pandemic, and our home office Zoom backgrounds, in the past. Let's leave old problems and stale office dynamics there, too.

What are your plans for reinvigorating your office experience? Reach out to me, Eryan O'Keefe, at eokeefe@jaffepr.com or leave a comment below.