



Return to Work Guide

Let's smoothly return to work while keeping focus on what's important

You've had a wonderful break and you've learnt lots along the way. This guide will help you smoothly re-enter your company or the workforce after your break and navigate this transition.

Use the guidance to help you prepare for your return and as a checklist of things to consider during your first few weeks back. Everyone's experience will be different to be prepared to adapt as you go and find what works for you.

Before your return – Reflect on your time away

The most important thing to do before you return to work is to spend some time reflecting on your break and what has changed for you. Complete the following reflection questions in your notebook

1. *Looking back to the person you were before your break, what's changed in how you see yourself?*
2. *What have you learnt about what's important to you?*
3. *What do you want to prioritize now?*
4. *What boundaries do you need to put in place at home and at work to stay balanced and focused?*
5. *What will you say 'No' to so that you keep your priorities in focus?*
6. *What are the top 3 key words that will describe your mindset in how you intend to return to work (e.g. curiosity, growth, patience)*

What to expect when you return

The process of returning to work can be a jarring experience. While your work may seem familiar to you, sometimes it can feel awkward or like things don't fit anymore. If you're returning to your previous role, these are even more heightened. Be patient and kind with yourself as you adjust back to work.

Returning to the work environment

- Being in a work/office environment may feel restrictive after the freedom you've had on your break – give yourself plenty of time to adjust and take time to walk outside or in different environments.

- Conforming to work hours or schedules may feel tiring and constraining – ease back into your work and consider slowly ramping up hours over the first few weeks.
- It may be difficult to be spending time with people who do not share your interests or beliefs – work places are diverse and you can't always choose your co-workers – Give yourself space to pause before you react in difficult situations so that you can mindfully choose how to respond.

Returning to a previous role/company

- Things will have changed - the company, the priorities, your role and this may feel confronting - give yourself time to adjust to the new normal.
- You will have changed in your perspectives and what's important to you, but no one at work will know that yet. People will expect you to slot into the 'old box' they had you in. This 'old box' will feel uncomfortable – like it doesn't fit you anymore. Be patient with people as they adjust to the 'new you' and learn about what's changed for you
- You may feel like you were away for ages, but your colleagues may be surprised to see you back already. Your perception of time lengthens on a break when you're more focused on living in the present moment. Don't be offended and take it as a sign that you had a recharging, inspiring break.
- Not everyone will be interested in how you spent your time on your break. Focus on sharing your stories with people who genuinely show interest and don't worry if other people don't show interest – everyone has their own stuff going on.
- There may be different reactions to your return. Consider the perspectives, beliefs, assumptions that others may make about you and your break from work. Try to understand what the different perspectives may be and how you may respond to them. Always give the benefit of the doubt and assume positive intent.

How to smoothly re-enter

A smooth re-entry process is so important. It allows you to calmly ease back into work and avoid becoming overwhelmed or losing sight of what you now feel is important in your life. Your re-entry process needs to incorporate your new perspectives, while also balancing the needs of the business and your colleagues. It's about finding a balance that honors your wellbeing and happiness and allows you to be productive and perform your role.

Understand what's changed

Gather information about what has changed in the business while you were away.

Consider

- Changes to the strategy or priorities for the business as a whole or your team
- Changes to your role based on changing priorities – they may need you to do different things or for you to do things differently
- Changes for your manager/boss – what are they now focused on or incentivized towards
- Changes to clients, partnerships, projects, initiatives – these things will have progressed while you were away so get the latest status and background.

Conversely, don't be surprised if you come back and it feels like nothing has changed! This is actually also common. Businesses sometimes are slow to move and change so you may feel that while your whole world shifted, little actually changed in the business. Try not to become frustrated with any lack of progress you perceive – acknowledge that you have a different perception of time while you're on a break and this will be impacting your view.

Set boundaries

What you feel is important for you and your life may have shifted while you've been away. Set boundaries with work that allow you to live a balanced, happy life, while also fulfilling your responsibilities at work. Agree these with your boss and communicate them with people who may be impacted.

For example

- I will not be contactable 6pm-8pm each night as I will be spending time with my kids
- I will only work on weekends if there is a business-critical emergency
- I will travel for business meetings up to once a month and I'll promote video conferencing as an alternative

Give yourself permission to say 'No' when your boundaries are pushed. You are the only person who will enforce your boundaries so guard them closely.

Check-in with your boss

In the first week, set up a meeting with your boss to discuss

- Changes to the business and your role
- Priorities - What they want you to focus on and what they are focusing on
- Your career vision and anything that's changed for you in relation to your career goals
- Your boundaries - approach this as an open discussion and be clear on what you agree

Look after your wellbeing

Keep a close eye on your physical, emotional and mental wellbeing and make sure you build in enough time for you to recharge from work stress and fatigue. Your return will take more energy as you adjust so attend to your self-care as though it is part of your job responsibilities. Be kind with yourself and adjust your approach as you learn how to stay recharged at work.

- Apply the [recharge model](#) to get the most recharge value out of your time off
- Keep progressing with your [Happy Life Tracker](#) and maintain your ritual of weekly ticking off your progress in your milestones and happy habits.

Connect with people

Make contact with the people who are important to you at work. Celebrate your return with colleagues who you share a close relationship with. Let them know you're back and talk about your break and what you learnt. Let them know what's changed for you and what's important for you now.

Build a support network around you

Build a network of people around you that will support your priorities, goals and new way of life. These people may be a combination of family, friends, colleagues, a partner. Anyone who will help you stay focused as well as reminding you to enjoy the journey along the way. Ask for their support and give them time to adjust to the new version of you.

Consider hiring a coach to help you with this if you feel you'll need some extra accountability and support

Enjoy the journey!