



Adjusting Mindsets, Reemerging in Transitional Times

June 8, 2020

Summary

In our recent [webinar](#), *Adjusting Mindsets, Reemerging in Transitional Times*, special guest [Juliette Kayyem](#), a national leader in America's homeland security, resilience, and safety efforts, and employment attorney Josh Davis charted a practical way forward for business in the midst of the pandemic and current civil unrest in our country.

State of Pandemic

The infection rate in the U.S. is still increasing, and we are now seeing between 8,000 and 10,000 fatalities per week. While the rate of the increase in infection has slowed, this is not because the virus is dissipating, but because quarantining and social distancing safety measures have been effective in keeping it at bay. As more industries reopen, we are entering a phase of adaptive recovery—in which we must learn to live around the impact of the virus. By reopening at this stage of the pandemic, we are focusing on risk reduction over risk elimination.

State of Unrest

In the past weeks, we have seen a wave of protest activity against a different crisis—police brutality and systemic racism. This activity is already having a widespread impact throughout the country. It is also true that large numbers of people protesting in groups for extended periods of time will likely increase the rate of infection. The increase in arrests we are seeing will only exacerbate this risk, by putting protesters in even closer proximity to one another and to police. Recognize that these protesters are willing to risk the consequences to protest these systemic problems. Recognize that your employees may be among them.

Company leadership is speaking out against racism and police brutality, both internally and externally. The majority of companies are still run primarily by white men of a certain age, and employers have focused a lot of energy on diversifying and promoting inclusivity in their workplaces. The next generation of leadership is going to look very different demographically.

As an employer, your messaging to your employees on this issue must be consistent with your goals of diversity and inclusion. Create opportunities for employees to safely share their concerns and experiences—and really listen. Muting or diluting the message by responding that “all lives matter” or focusing on progressive causes generally are not inclusive responses. Attempting to shut down these conversations or redirect attention elsewhere is also not inclusive, and will be extremely harmful to your employees and to your workplace environment.

Reopening Cities

State and local governments are reopening cities in phases. Employers should not focus on whether they are allowed to reopen but on whether they should. Communities are opening back up prematurely in an attempt to balance the urge to return to a routine with the reality that people will likely get sick in the course of reopening. What is your jurisdiction allowing? Where schools remain closed, how are these phases impacting employees with children?

Reopening Workplaces

To the extent that your business can operate with employees working from home, focus on continuing to build a strong virtual community for your employees.

If you have serious, concrete reasons to reopen your physical workplaces, you should do so with three principles in mind: (1) minimize contact intensity—close workplace cafeterias, gyms, etc. entirely; (2) manage the number of contacts—only bring back 25% of your workforce at a time, and maintain social distancing in all workplace areas including elevators; (3) maximize individual mitigation policies—enforce mask wearing, social distancing, and frequent handwashing among your workforce.

To stay updated on our latest advisories, blogs, and guidance related to COVID-19, please visit the Goulston & Storrs Online Resource Center goulstonstorrs.com/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/



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Special Guest!
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