

# Hit The Reset Button With Employees: Prepare To Reopen And Re-Engage

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As retailers move toward re-opening and companies prepare to re-engage operations post COVID-19, it's clear we are not going to back to "normal." As a business leader, you can't afford to expect to employees to jump back in and return to business-as-usual. During the pandemic, a lot has changed in employees' lives, in the world, and perhaps in your company. To make sure your people are prepared to get back to work, hit the reset button with employees on employee experience (EX), communications, and expectations.



Prepare for post COVID-19. Hit the reset button with employees on employee experience (EX),... [+]

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**Reset EX.** Most likely, your customer experience (CX) has been disrupted by the coronavirus. As you adjust to the new needs and requirements for serving your customers, you should also consider those of your employees. You probably need to re-think many aspects of your EX.

EX is the sum of all experiences an employee has throughout his/her connection with your organization. It involves every interaction and touchpoint — from the first contact in the hiring process to the last interaction after the end of employment. Just like CX, EX must deliberately managed.

As you look to reopen or restart operations after the crisis, it is now more important than ever to pay attention to the experiences you design and deliver to employees. Although unemployment is at an all-time high, you can't assume that employees you laid off are going to come back to you. They might have found temporary work elsewhere or they can easily be lured away by other companies that are re-opening at the same time. Employee interactions and routines are probably going to be different as you bridge in-office and remote work or incorporate other operational changes. And the heightened anxiety or pressure many employees are experiencing — combined with negative feelings that may have arisen due to lay-offs, furloughs, and reduced pay — mean you have to work hard to re-establish employees' trust and focus on the business.

A unique, integral EX can help you overcome all these COVID-19 related challenges. Design your EX around your core values so that employees experience them clearly and tangibly. Ensure the value proposition you offer to employees meets their elevated level and diverse range of needs. Create new or different experiences to promote togetherness, optimism, and agility. And ensure the experiences you provide to employees help inform, inspire, equip, and empower them to deliver on-brand customer experiences.

**Reset communications.** If you're like many business leaders, you may have struggled to communicate appropriately and effectively with employees during the crisis. A recent Gallup survey found that only half (52%) of U.S. employees say their employer has communicated a clear plan of action in response to COVID-19. A similar number (54%) strongly agree that their immediate supervisor keeps them informed about what is going on in the organization as it relates to the impact of the pandemic.

Communication will be even more critical as you try to get employees back to work. You must first understand that a lot may have changed for some employees in the interim. Instead of assuming that they'll show up the way they used to, get informed through pulse surveys and discussion forums. Seek to understand how they're really doing, what you can expect from them, and what they need to stay focused and productive. Then ensure your communication demonstrates empathy – convey your understanding of their situation and your shared humanity.

You also need to create excitement about your brand and your organization. Reopening is a reason to celebrate, so infuse your communications with energy and momentum. Use the opportunity to remind people of your company's overarching purpose and how their work contributes to that mission.

Communicate with clarity, transparency, and authenticity. Share as much as you can about reopening strategies and schedules. Explain what has changed in your business, operations, CX, and EX – and what hasn't – and why. And as much as possible, convey what you expect to change going forward. Above all, ensure that your communication is aligned and consistent with other leaders' so employees are not confused or alienated by conflicting messages.

**Reset expectations.** In your rush to get back to business, don't overlook the need to help employees adapt to the operational changes and transition to the new definitions of success that will inevitably be part of your re-entry.

Government guidance and regulations may conflict or change quickly, customers and their needs will probably vary greatly, and your business may come back to life in fits and starts. All this requires your people to be flexible and adaptable. Make sure they know what core attitudes and behaviors are expected of them regardless of disruptions.

Employees also need to know how changes in your operations impact what success looks like for them and how new company goals or business targets affect how their performance will be evaluated. Conduct re-onboarding sessions to refresh and align everyone and to deliver updated content such as new safety measures or customer policies. And develop retraining or upskilling programs to ensure employees are set up to succeed.

Also consider adopting new metrics to help you optimize employee engagement and use them to shape your own expectations and actions. For example, you might track employee engagement with communication from leaders and/or measure how well employees feel they understand the company's priorities. Whatever you do, make changes proactively and clearly.

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Now is the time to hit the reset button with employees. As you prepare to reopen and re-engage, take advantage of this opportunity to re-calibrate and re-charge your efforts and propel your business forward.



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