



THE RETURNING TO WORK
HANDBOOK
REFLECTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYEES

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

Organizations across the globe are going through a period of great change and uncertainty. Entire teams, departments and businesses have been forced to adjust the way they work by employing new tools, learning new processes and solving new problems. As an employee, you likely experienced a lot of changes in a relatively short period of time—from the location of your workspace to the content of your work. While riding these waves of transformation, it is important to remember that this will not last forever. You can take this opportunity to initiate your own development by ensuring that the lessons you've learned during this experience don't go to waste.

Many companies are now discussing how to transition to “normal.” It may not be the normal you were accustomed to before, but it will be a transition to something more permanent and stable. As a result, you need to prepare to (once again) uproot the way you work. This transition and new normal will be different for every organization, but the need for successful and engaged employees never changes. To be proactive in ensuring your own success and engagement, you must communicate effectively with your manager and coworkers and ensure clarity in your

understanding of your manager’s expectations. However, it is during times of rapid change that individuals often struggle to take the time necessary to reflect on what experience has taught them. To set yourself up with strategies for success in the transition to a new normal, you must reflect.

This handbook is designed to guide every employee navigating this transition through a new lens by providing strategies influenced by your own reflections. You will begin setting a base by processing the change that has occurred before moving on to evaluate your goals and performance during this period all while considering strategies for your transition to a new normal.

Maintaining your success and engagement throughout this transition will enable you to continue to develop even while facing unpredictable challenges. Situational Leadership® provides you with the tools to “Take Charge” of your own performance.



PROCESSING CHANGE

It can be easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of day-to-day tasks associated with organizational change and transition. However, it is paramount that you take the time to process the changes to both your organization and your personal work experience. To effectively strategize for the road ahead, you must first gain clarity on where you've been.

“Diagnose” is the first of the four key competencies in Situational Leadership®. To effectively diagnose, you need to reflect on the situation and approach it with a clear mind.

PROCESSING CHANGE: REFLECTION

Use the following reflection questions to compare where you are today versus where you were before your organization went through this shift. Use the space below each question to record your thoughts.



How has your day-to-day work experience changed? Think about your physical work setup, the type of work you do and with whom you communicate.



How has day-to-day communication changed? Consider the mode of communication, with whom you communicate, frequency and content.

PROCESSING CHANGE: REFLECTION



How has your connection to the organization changed? Do you feel the same level of connection to the organization as you did under normal circumstances?



How would you describe your current level of engagement? Do you feel motivated to do your work? Do you enjoy the processes of your work?



How would you describe your current level of success? Are you completing tasks on time and at an appropriate level of quality? Are you hitting the goals set by your manager?



Do you feel your manager has supported you during this time?

Do you feel you have adequate levels of communication with your manager? Do you feel your manager is engaged in your personal development?

It is likely that your answers to the questions on which you reflected included both positive and negative changes. While change can be uncomfortable and prolonged periods of uncertainty may never be welcome, change often provides opportunities for growth and positive transformation. It can also shine a light on areas that need improvement. As an employee, you may sometimes feel as though you do not have the power necessary to make changes to your situation. However, proactively communicating with your manager and taking steps to enable your own development can have an enormous effect on both your success and engagement. Consider the following strategies to further contemplate the change your organization has experienced and how that has affected your role. This will provide you with valuable information when considering adjustments for your transition toward a new normal.

PROCESSING CHANGE: STRATEGIES

- **If you noted any positive changes when considering the Reflection section, document them.** Determine what you can do to maintain those positive changes as you transition to more permanent processes. Not all changes may be transferable, but the ones that are could cause you to be more engaged than ever.

- **If you noted any negative changes when considering the questions in the Reflection section, document them.** Though every new experience is an opportunity to grow, not all the changes we make to face day-to-day challenges are effective long term. If there are any habits or processes you implemented during this time that you do not want to carry forward permanently, document them and consider how you can avoid falling into those processes and habits as you begin to transition.

- **Openly communicate your experiences with your manager.** Use the positive and negative changes you considered in the previous question as a starting point to have an honest discussion with your manager. If any of the negative changes you noted were mandated by your manager, give them constructive feedback and specific reasons why those didn't work for you. If any of the positive changes you noted were mandated by your manager, let them know how those affected your work and voice your appreciation. Don't assume that your manager knows what works for you and what doesn't.

- **Ask your coworkers about their experiences.** Remember, you were not in this alone. Your coworkers likely have many of the

same experiences and struggles that you did. Ask them about the strategies they employed and how those worked or didn't work for them. Regardless of whether or not you want to implement any of their advice moving forward, hearing their experiences will open you up to better understanding your coworkers' work processes and may make you think about your challenges in a different light.

EVALUATING YOUR GOALS

When most people set personal and professional goals at the beginning of the year, they don't consider the possibility of several months of unavoidable disruption. As such, it can be tempting to get disheartened when those goals are no longer attainable through no fault of your own. The added stress of possible professional repercussions only adds to the discouragement. It doesn't take long for these feelings to lead to a lack of motivation and eventually to performance regression. This is why it's important to evaluate your goals as soon as possible and prepare yourself for an honest discussion with your manager.

Step 1 of the Taking Charge Process is: Identify the specific task When reviewing your goals, break them down to the task level to appropriately assess their attainability.

EVALUATING YOUR GOALS: REFLECTION

Use the following reflection questions to consider your previous goals and jump-start a conversation with your manager about new goals. Use the space below each question to record your thoughts.



What were your main goals before this period of change? This could include abstract goals such as skill improvement, concrete goals set by your manager or personal goals for professional development.



How did your goals affect the organization as a whole? Does the completion or lack thereof have a ripple effect on organizational goals?

EVALUATING YOUR GOALS: REFLECTION



Which of your goals is still attainable? Do you need to adjust timelines or need any additional support? Have you communicated this information to your manager?



Which of your goals is no longer attainable? When will these goals be attainable, if ever? Have you communicated this information to your manager?



Have your organization's goals changed? Sometimes change reveals new opportunities that may alter your organization's priorities. Have you heard about new organizational goals that may affect your own goals?



Have you identified any new goals for yourself? Have you had the opportunity to talk about these goals with your manager?



Have you recently had a discussion with your manager about your goals? If so, did you come away from that meeting with a clear understanding of your manager's expectations for you? Do you feel confident about your ability to meet those expectations?

It is important to understand that these reflection questions are not designed to establish new goals for you, but instead help you look back on the past several months and consider where you may need to raise concerns with your manager or where you require further clarity. Communication and clarity are of the utmost importance when establishing and meeting realistic goals. Don't wait for your manager to reach out to you if you have concerns. It is likely that your manager will appreciate you raising red flags sooner so that you can adjust rather than waiting until it's too late to salvage the progress you have made. Use the following strategies to work toward communicating with your manager and gaining a clear understanding of their expectations for you moving forward.

EVALUATING YOUR GOALS: STRATEGIES

□ **Ensure the information you have about your goals is correct.**

When everyone is grappling with the day-to-day challenges of change and transition, it can be tempting to assume that you and your boss are on the same page based on a passing comment or perceived unspoken agreement. As you prepare to transition to normalcy, make sure you take the time to meet with your boss and clearly present your understanding of your goals. Verify that you and your manager have the same understanding and if you don't, ask clarifying questions to create alignment.

- ❑ **Review the goals set by your manager.** If you haven't already, take the time to look at your goals from before this organizational change and honestly evaluate whether or not they are still attainable now. Consider what would need to be done to make these goals achievable (e.g., timeline shift, help from a coworker, additional tools, etc.).

- ❑ **Manage expectations.** It can be tempting to want to stay on track with your goals exactly as they were established at the beginning of the year. However, to perform effectively, your work must be consistent and reliable. There may be some goals that, even with adjustment, simply aren't possible. It is better to be upfront with yourself and your boss than to damage your professional reputation by missing deadlines or turning in subpar work.

- ❑ **Proactively schedule a meeting with your boss if you have concerns.** If you think you may be unable to meet your goals under the given circumstances, set aside time to meet with your boss before anything escalates. The sooner you can do this the better as it will allow you more time to consider and achieve new goals. Be prepared to explain how you came to this conclusion and be proactive in providing alternate solutions if possible.

- ❑ **Review your personal goals for professional improvement.** Like many employees, some of your goals for the year may not have been set by your manager or organization. You may have set your own goals to improve your skills, earn a certification or learn a new tool. Don't feel as though you need to let these goals fall to the background due to disruption. Prioritize the goals that are most

EVALUATING YOUR GOALS: STRATEGIES

important to you and consider what you can change about them to make them achievable. By focusing on the goals that are most important and postponing others, you can maintain motivation and have accomplishments to recall when you set goals for next year.

ASSESSING YOUR PERFORMANCE

You persevered through unprecedented change and that alone is cause for celebration. However, in the rush to get back to normal, it can be too easy to gloss over your performance during this time. Even if your organization doesn't have a formal performance evaluation process, this is a good time to reflect on your own performance and how it may have changed when faced with intense disruption. By candidly assessing your own performance, you can take the steps necessary to maintain or improve your performance as you transition to a new normal.

Step 2 of the Taking Charge Process is: Assess and describe my current Performance Readiness® which will expose areas in which you need improvement. However, it is important that you involve your manager when moving on to Step 3: Communicate my performance needs to create true behavior change.

ASSESSING YOUR PERFORMANCE: REFLECTION

Use the following reflection questions to prompt evaluation of your performance and identify where you need to communicate with your manager to avoid regression or pursue development. Use the space below each question to record your thoughts.



Do you feel you were successful during this period? How do you measure this success (e.g., revenue, products developed, customer feedback, etc.)?



What were some of your standout accomplishments? Why do these accomplishments stand out to you? Are there any connecting factors between these accomplishments? Do you feel your accomplishments have been appropriately recognized by your manager?



What were some of your failures during this period? Have you discussed these with your manager? Are there any connecting factors between these failures?



Were there any instances in which you feel you went above and beyond to exceed expectations? If so, what motivated you to do so? Do you feel your efforts were appropriately recognized by your manager?



Were there any instances where you displayed a negative attitude that harmed your team? If so, what caused you to behave negatively? Was this behavior addressed by your manager?

ASSESSING YOUR PERFORMANCE: REFLECTION



Were there any situations where you were unable to work at all?

If so, what caused this? Is it possible that you'll face this scenario in the future?



Do you feel you maintained a positive attitude during this

period? If so, what contributed to this positivity? How can you maintain this positivity moving forward?



Did you learn anything new during this period?

This could be a new skill, tool or work process. If so, how did this make you feel? Can you continue to utilize this moving forward?



Was there anything about your reaction to change that surprised you? This could be positive or negative. For example, you may have been surprised at your flexibility or at how difficult it was to change certain routines.

It is important to recognize your own hard work and resiliency, especially during times of uncertainty. Many employees put in the extra effort even while under intense personal stress to help their organization through these difficult times. However, it is also important that you take note of areas where your performance slipped so that you can stop regression as you prepare to transition. Don't be afraid to communicate your performance needs to your manager. Honest, accurate evaluation of your performance is the only way to continue to develop. Use the following strategies to start conversations with your manager and maintain your success and engagement throughout the transition to your new normal.

ASSESSING YOUR PERFORMANCE: STRATEGIES

- **Celebrate your victories.** As humans, we all desire recognition for our accomplishments, and receiving that recognition can provide a significant boost to engagement at work. Be confident in telling your manager or coworkers about something you achieved of which you are particularly proud. Good news and positivity are always appreciated, especially in times of stress. However, remember to be wary of the line between celebrating and boasting.

- **Consider where you can improve your performance.** Everyone's performance falters occasionally when faced with uncertainty. You may even find yourself losing confidence in tasks you perform flawlessly under normal circumstances. If you notice your performance regressing on any task, think about what factors may have caused this. What about the task, or your attitude toward the task, has changed?

- **Discuss areas of performance regression with your manager.** Once you've spent some time contemplating your performance and where you see your performance slipping, schedule a meeting with your manager. Express your concerns and explain what you need from them to stop the regression. It is best to come into this conversation as prepared as possible. Think about specific changes or assistance you need to improve your performance for the tasks in question.

- **Contemplate areas of unexpected performance improvement.**

Times of change can often challenge you to try new things and push yourself further than you normally would. Sometimes these challenges reveal new skills and passions. If there was anything about your performance or a new skill that surprised you in a positive way during this experience, think about what it was that allowed you to perform so well. Take note of any changes you made that allowed this success and consider how you can continue to improve in these areas moving forward.
- **Discuss areas of performance development with your boss.** If there are any new skills that you got to apply during this period that you want to explore further, let your manager know. They may be able to find a way to continue giving you related tasks that they otherwise wouldn't if they didn't know you were interested. Allowing yourself to explore areas of work you're passionate about will improve your engagement.
- **Ask your manager questions about their expectations for processes that changed during this period.** If you experienced any processes that changed while working under new circumstances, don't assume that just because your organization is transitioning to a more familiar work setting that everything will return to how it was. It's very possible that your team or organization started using a new tool that will continue to be beneficial in the future. As such,

ASSESSING TEAM PERFORMANCE: STRATEGIES

check in with your manager to ensure you are on the same page around which processes you will be continuing and which processes you will retire.

- **Continue to assess your performance throughout the transition.** Assessing your performance is not a one-time event. Internal and external circumstances are always changing and can have a great effect on your ability and willingness to perform your tasks. As you experience another shift at work, it is important that you frequently reflect on past tasks so that you can create a clear picture of either development or regression.

- **Communicate your performance needs to your boss throughout the transition.** As you maintain an awareness of your performance throughout the transition, be prepared to raise any obstacles or concerns about your performance to your manager. If you have performance needs that they aren't meeting, such as clearer directions on a task, let them know so they can empower you to be successful. Likewise, if you feel that you are being micromanaged on a task you are confident on and experienced in doing, let them know that they need to give you space so you can be successful.



EXECUTING THE TRANSITION

Transitions by definition mean change. Even if it's returning to something familiar, you will once again have to upend your way of working to change to a new normal. This will look different for every organization and for every employee within each organization. Regardless of the specifics of your personal transition, what is most important is that you have a clear understanding of your organization's plan and that you prepare yourself with the necessary tools to be successful.

Step 4 of the Taking Charge Process: Manage my movement is an ongoing process that you will use throughout the transition and beyond to enable development and prevent regression.

EXECUTING THE TRANSITION: REFLECTION

To help you think about how you can prepare for the transition, consider the following reflection questions. Use the space below each question to record your thoughts.



Has your manager clearly communicated your organization's transition plan? Do you know the specifics of when, where and how you will be transitioning? Do you have a clear understanding of what exactly is expected of you during this transition?



Are you looking forward to the transition? To what, specifically, are you looking forward?

**Is there anything you will miss from your current work situation?**

Is there any way to apply those practices, routines, etc. as you transition to your new normal?



Do you have any concerns about the transition? About what, specifically, are you concerned? Have you raised these concerns to your manager?

**Have you communicated your transition needs to your manager?**

You may have specific needs during this transition given your unique circumstances (e.g., a delayed timeline or different work schedule). If so, is your manager aware of these needs? Are you being appropriately accommodated?

EXECUTING THE TRANSITION: REFLECTION



Do you have a plan to stick to your deadlines during this transition? Have your deadlines changed to accommodate this shift?

If not, are you confident you can still meet these deadlines?



What do you think will be different about the new normal?

How will your day-to-day life at work change? What brought you to this understanding? Have you discussed these changes with your manager?



What does your manager consider to be a successful transition?

What are your manager's priorities during this transition that would make it successful? Have these priorities been clearly communicated to you?



Is there anything you learned from transitioning at the beginning of this crisis that you will apply to this transition? Consider some of your reflections on what worked and what did not from the previous sections. Do any of them apply here?

The purpose of reflecting on the past several months and on the positive and negative changes that occurred is for you to be able to take that information and make more informed decisions in the future. As you transition, remember that this is not just back to normal but to a new normal. It is rare that you get an opportunity to reconsider the ways in which you work and analyze what works and what doesn't. This is your chance to set yourself up for even greater success than you could have achieved without disruption. It all comes down to how you navigate this transition. Use the following strategies to enable your own success and communicate your needs with your manager as you transition.

EXECUTING THE TRANSITION: STRATEGIES

- **Ask your manager about your organization's transition plans.**
If your organization has not already clearly communicated the transition plans, but you know that a transition will be happening soon, ask your manager what those plans are. If your manager is not prepared to answer your questions, ask when you can expect the plan to be communicated. By getting this information as soon as possible, you can employ strategies and begin making accommodations early to set yourself up for success.

- **Make sure you know the specifics.** You will need to know the when, where and how of your individual transition plans. Many organizational transitions will vary from individual to individual, so if you have any questions about what is expected of you during this period, ask your manager.

- **Raise transition concerns to your manager.** You may have specific concerns about your transition due to unique circumstances. If this is the case, let your manager know as soon as possible so they can accommodate you. Even if organizational communication about transition plans has not occurred yet, if you foresee anything that may delay your transition or require special consideration, it is better to let your manager know as soon as possible. This way they can adjust for any ramifications your accommodations may cause.

- **Ask your manager for their performance expectations during the transition.** Never assume you know what your manager's expectations are unless they've been clearly stated, especially during a period of change. Ask your manager specific questions about their performance expectations for you. You may want to ask

about deadlines, sales goals or any other performance factor that could be affected by your transition.

- **Review your tasks due during the transition period.** Once you have a clear understanding of your manager's expectations for your performance, take the time to review the tasks you will be completing during this period. Make sure that all your goals and deadlines during this period are still achievable. If any are not achievable, think about what changes would need to be made to the task to make them viable (e.g., extended deadline, additional resources or assistance from a coworker).
- **Raise performance concerns to your manager.** If, while reviewing your tasks during this period, you determine that one or more may no longer be achievable under the new circumstances, schedule a meeting with your manager to discuss your concerns. Come to this meeting prepared with the specifics on how you came to this conclusion and what adjustments you think need to be made to enable you to complete the task.
- **Consider what personal changes you want to make in the new normal.** If you made any positive changes to your work processes that you think can be implemented moving forward, consider the steps you need to take to make that possible. Depending on the scale or possible spillover of these changes, you may need to have a discussion with your manager to make sure you are on the same page.
- **Don't be afraid to overcommunicate.** During times of change, it is always better to overcommunicate than under communicate.

Your ability to take ownership of your success and engagement in your role is critical in this new business environment. In the language of Situational Leadership®:

There is no better time than NOW to “**TAKE CHARGE**” of your performance.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

To further improve your leadership skills while navigating the unique challenges organizations are facing today, please download the **Remote Employee Handbook: How to Take Charge and Be Effective**. In addition, look out for future change management content developed by The Center for Leadership Studies.

Situational Leadership®: Taking Charge helps front-line employees and individual contributors develop a thorough understanding of the leadership process. When employees can recognize a clear connection between their performance and the success of the organization, they perform to the full extent of their capabilities, as opposed to simply working within the parameters of their job descriptions.

If you are interested in additional resources about how to lead more effectively by utilizing the Situational Leadership® Model, visit **[situational.com](https://www.situational.com)**.