Making the most of your first day back at the office!

After following the bed-to-Zoom commute for a couple of years now, the idea of going back to the office in person can elicit some anxiety and discomfort. The important thing to know is, if you are feeling a bit unsure about returning, you're not alone.

So, what is the way forward?

Plan your first day such that you can take in your surroundings and adjust to the new routine to make this transition easier. Here's what can help:

Establish a new routine

If you have received the notification to join the work at a particular date, then start planning backwards. Perhaps you can start with setting up a new schedule to get up in the morning and get your chores done. Start doing this at least a week or 10-days before so that you can settle in the routine.

Pay attention to the positives

While the disruption to your daily routine can feel daunting, you can lessen the stress that comes with this change in your work by focusing on the positives. **Social interactions, a decrease in distractions, a firmer boundary between work and home life** are some merits of being in the office.

Create a framework of your day

Note the habits you'd like to maintain when you're back in the office and come up with the guidelines to enforce them and follow through from Day 1. It could be as simple as being intentional about breaks or dedicating time in the morning for catching up on mails.

Schedule some face time with supervisors, leaders and managers

Discuss what their priorities and expectations are now that everyone is back in the office. Ask whether expectations, deadlines or processes have changed now. You can also take this time to discuss any accommodations that you need while you get adjusted to this new routine.

Give yourself and others time to re-engage

For many of us, it might take some time to get used to being in an office environment again. There will be a few colleagues who had experienced losses during the pandemic, and may still be learning to navigate them. There might be a few whom you never met in person before. Treat yourself and them with the same grace and kindness, as you all navigate this new routine.

Set your boundaries

Use this back-to-office shift to set your **boundaries in terms of availability, communication, safety and any other particulars regarding your work**. Communicate what works best for your productivity and your mental health with your colleagues and managers so as to come up with a plan that helps you transition effectively.

Take care of your mental health

Practising self-care can help you manage the stress of change. Don't take your emotional and mental health for granted. Create a healthy routine with timely meals, consistent sleep schedule, adequate physical activity, and relaxation time. Doing so will help you adapt to this change better.

# Navigating the change as a leader

If you are a leader or someone who is supposed to lead others through this change and help them acclimatise to it, here's what you can do in addition to following the strategies listed before:

Communicate proactively

Keep your communication lines open and keep your team updated with the latest change in policies and processes. Even if you don't have all the answers, listen to their concerns and issues with empathy.

Help your team balance individual and group needs
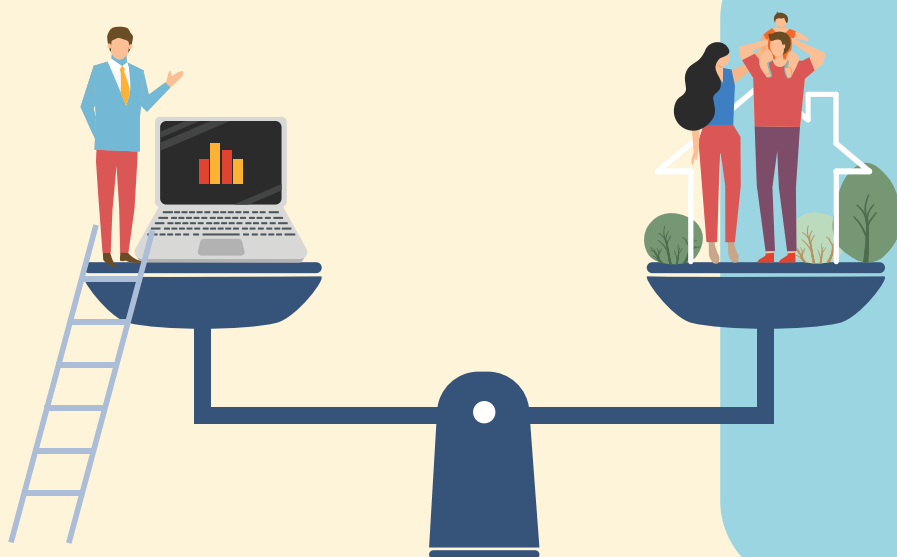
It can be that while navigating everyone's concerns and boundaries, you may find some of them at odds with the needs of the team as a group. Encourage the team to come up with new work practices where there is uniformity. This could mean creating rituals that require all members to be present for collaboration during a set window of time.

Give your team the space to grieve

No matter how exciting this return is or how many new positive changes it brings, all your teammates might experience some loss with this transition. Maybe they miss being around their partner, or their family. Or now they have to live alone altogether. Give them the time and space to acknowledge this loss and come to terms with it.

Inculcate healthy mental health practices in your routines

Doing so will not only allow you to balance your needs with that of your team and organisation's, but will also help you set a good example for your team. It will also set the right tone for your organisation's new refreshed work culture.

Lastly, remember that just like working remotely, going back to the office will eventually feel like a normal part of life—one that comes with advantages, as well as some challenges.
This too, shall become the normal, soon enough.