

OUTLINE FOR CONSULTING PROCESS

Although each situation is unique, the following is to help clarify the process for developing a workplace plan for an employee who is returning to work or staying at work and the employer (usually the direct supervisor). The entire process usually takes 3-4 days and involves the following steps.

1. Interview all stakeholders including the manager, supervisor, human resource personnel, occupational health or wellness personnel, union rep, and where relevant – co-workers/colleagues. The individual interviews are usually about 1 hour for each person with the exception of the manager who usually requires 1.5 to 2 hours. These conversations are intended to provide the consultant with a comprehensive understanding of workplace culture, realities and responsibilities of the job, history of workplace interactions and any limitations or boundaries that would affect the workplace plan. These interviews are confidential and only aggregate information that does not identify people will be used to assist in the process.
2. Assess the need for education or awareness about mental health issues and if necessary set up a training session(s).
3. Review the job description and relevant company policies and benefits information.
4. Interview the employee and develop a workplace plan that includes three parts:
 - a. What do you need to be successful at work? (This addresses the accommodation necessary to allow the individual to be a productive employee.)
 - b. What are you willing to do in order to make this work? (This addresses the employee's responsibility to be a productive employee and considers issues such as self-care, work processes, and interactions with others.)
 - c. What approach do you prefer if a performance or management concern arises in the future? (This is to help the employer find a way to address future issues in a manner that is not harmful to the employee and to help the employee understand that once the accommodation is in place they will be held to the same performance standards as others.)
5. Where possible ask the employee's preferred health provider (doctor, psychiatrist, or therapist) to review the plan and confirm that it is acceptable and that they will be able to support the employee as they return to work.
6. Check with management that the plan is acceptable.
7. Create the plan document.

8. Meet with the manager and the employee to review the plan and ensure a meeting of minds over the intent and the way it will be honoured.
9. The manager and employee use the plan to facilitate on-going conversations about work-related issues and to develop solutions where necessary.

In most cases the plan will require the employer to use a different approach in communication and may require some flexibility around how and when work is done. It rarely requires a significant investment in terms of cost or asks for the employee to be excused from work. Most return-to-works do involve a graduated return over 3 months where the leave was more than 2 months in duration. This allows for retraining, reorientation and a gradual increase in work pace.

Some of the responses we have had from participants in past return-to-work or stay-at-work consultations include:

From the employee:

“This is like a breath of fresh air.”

“I can’t believe [my employer] did this for me.”

“I feel like I have a new lease on life.”

From the employer:

“I never could have brought those things up.”

“I cannot believe you were able to do this.”

“This might actually work!”