



### Executive Brief

#### Lessons on Going Back to the Office

Moderator: Susan Lucas-Conwell, *Executive Vice President, CSIRO US*

Panelists: Angela Femmer, *Director, Competitive Positioning, Brewer Science, Inc*

Ralph Morales III, *Head of Innovation, SmartOrg*

April Bertram, *Senior Business Development Director, GOJO Industries*

#### **Abstract**

Organizations of every size need to get practical about the future of the workplace. This Virtual Event exclusively for Growth Innovation Leadership Council members offered a roadmap on how to bring employees back to the office. The panelists discussed the process to determine when, and for whom, a work-from-anywhere model might be more effective, and explored 'job crafting' to strengthen skills-to-job matching and employee success. Participants also shared timelines and details about how—and to what degree—their organizations planned to transition their employees back to the office.

#### **Key Take-Aways:**

- Fresh perspectives on how to shift and scale a blended “Work from Anywhere” model
- Success factors in leading and managing blended-location teams and individuals

Susan Lucas-Conwell, an innovation expert with over twenty-five years of international leadership and advisory experience, including a proven track record translating innovation into growth, moderated this Virtual Event focused on the future of work. Susan led a lively discussion on the changes in logistics, as well as the effects on business and employee behaviors wrought by the pandemic.

The panel was comprised of Angela Femmer, an experienced director in the semiconductors industry who is skilled in strategic partnerships; Ralph Morales, who brought his considerable finance and innovation expertise to the virtual table; and April Bertram, a director of business development with expertise in B2B and the consumer goods industry. These impressive leaders from across industries shared their recent experiences and plans for the future of work with council members, fielding questions and providing timely insights, too.

#### **“The office won’t be the same.”**

The discussion began with council members being asked, “*What does going back to the office look like for you (and your organization)?*” Replies included:

- Going back means people need to feel safe and comfortable.
- I don’t think we are going back until next year.

- As a research company with labs, we are experimenting with new protocols and procedures. We wear masks and the ways to walk in hallways have changed. We are being very careful and there is no travel unless it's business critical.
- We have developed a detailed back-to-the-office plan, it will be a phased in approach but we have not started going back yet.
- A vast majority of our employees already worked remotely, but some are going into the plants less. From a technology standpoint, we still have things to figure out.
- Our manufacturing operations did not stop, but we needed to reinvent some of the procedures. This included operating at 100% capacity at all times, fully leveraging night shifts, masks for safety, and more. Otherwise, we have been generally encouraged to work from home as much as possible.
- Like so many others, our office closed in March. Safety is a priority. We will likely re-evaluate at the end of the year, but the office won't be the same.

## Back to the Office

### Three Incremental Shifts

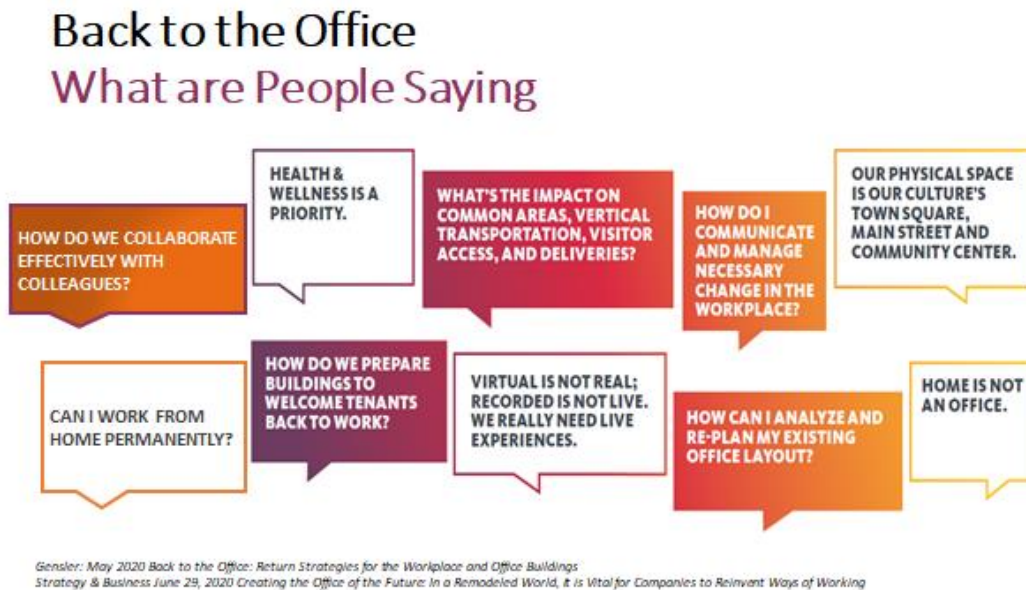


Gensler: May 2020 Back to the Office: Return Strategies for the Workplace and Office Buildings

*Graphic above courtesy of April Bertram*

The presenters shared that their organizations were also focused on safety, and considering phased in back-to-work approaches. One mentioned specific quarantine procedures for employees who leave town or have contact with out of towners. Another presenter shared that their organization was starting to schedule socially distanced meetings in office work spaces, being very mindful of keeping groups small and enforcing a strict track and trace procedure for potential participants. This led to a discussion about how so many office spaces were not designed for social distancing and other pandemic concerns.

April Bertram discussed some of the logistics and collaboration challenges involved in going back to work in the new normal, and stated that office space layouts would change significantly in the next six months. April shared the graphic below, which illustrated common questions and concerns:



Graphic above courtesy of April Bertram

The group discussed some possible remedies to office space challenges including:

- Staggered work times
- More closed off spaces
- Stationary workstations that discouraged employees from moving and wandering the building (and a layout that reinforces this)
- Better air quality and more fresh air
- Smart building applications
- Contact tracing
- Social distancing enforcement
- Enhanced cleaning procedures and more

Corporate culture was another topic of discussion. Most agreed that keeping the spirit of companies and their unique cultures alive is important and has been very affected by the pandemic. As noted, on-boarding of new employees virtually is a real challenge; one participant shared that they had a new policy of assigning buddies to new hires to help them get acclimated remotely.

Making sure employees are staying healthy mentally was also addressed. When Susan asked the group for insights and tips to enhance employee connections and support, members shared some of the actions their organizations were taking to improve communications and stay connected. These included voluntary participation in a Virtual 5K and sharing of proof/pictures

afterwards, twice-a-week, non-work “check-ins” complete with Grubhub expensed lunches and even complimentary coaching for employees.

The members also shared some fun “best practices” for enhancing the work from home experience. These included virtual cooking events and in-person outdoor recreational activities. One manager stated that she did not want to put pressure on people to get together for work if they were not comfortable doing so due to health concerns; a very important point.

Finally, one member shared that his company was strongly encouraging employees to use their vacation time to re-charge and take a break from the stress of a very difficult year. He observed that he had definitely seen a difference in those who took some time away from work.

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