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## Transitional Return to Work Programs that Last

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## Transitional Return to Work Programs that Last

Supporting employees during their leave, while also focusing on the transition back to work, can be a confusing and stressful time for both the employee and employer. In this session we will explore the cost benefits of Transitional Return to Work (TRTW) programs that employers can adopt to help address the unique needs of employees. We will also analyze the positive impact of paying attention to the small details that demonstrate commitment and caring for the well-being of team members.

- Best practices and considerations for building a TRTW program
- Educating and motivating front-line managers to consider accommodations
- Creating a positive experience for both employees and employers



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## Transitional Return to Work

<p><b>What is it?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasizes an employee's own position on a gradual basis</li> <li>• Proactive job modification</li> <li>• Sets realistic expectations for employees and managers</li> <li>• Acknowledges the value of an employee's capabilities</li> <li>• Focuses on the transition from no-work to full duty work</li> <li>• Is time-limited</li> </ul>	<p><b>What is the benefit?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive impacts to claim durations</li> <li>• Positive culture changes over time</li> <li>• Reduced turnover and overtime usage</li> <li>• Improves employee morale &amp; mental well-being</li> <li>• Improves/maintains productivity levels</li> <li>• Creates opportunity for stay at work</li> <li>• Reduces manager's administrative time to coordinate absences</li> </ul>
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**TRTW "To Do's"**

- **Manager: Create a positive experience for the employee**
  - Be open-minded, flexible and creative
  - Stay connected, provide support and show you care
  - Partner together on a proactive RTW plan prior to the leave
  - Provide a smooth transition as they RTW
  - Create a positive welcome back experience
  - Check in often
- **Employee: Remain engaged**
  - Provide updated medical releases
  - Provide input and actively participate in your RTW
  - Keep your manager updated on your RTW progress
  - Remain in contact with your manager, colleagues, and H.R.

[Absence Management Toolkit \(an24.com\)](#)



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**Return to Work Guiding Principles**

Employers should:

- Create a TRTW policy
- Conduct training
- Ensure alignment
- Explore RTW options
- Partner
- Engage
- Prepare for RTW
- Check in regularly



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**RTW Culture Personas**

- **Cynical** – believes everyone files a claim to avoid work
- **On the fence** – has some cynicism but also believes some claims are legitimate
- **Confused** – not certain what he/she should do when an employee files for an absence or how to accommodate
- **Collaborative** – interacts with employees frequently, reaches out and does whatever is reasonable to help their employee return to work



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**POLLING: Which of these management personas best represents your employer's work culture**

-  **a. Cynical** – believes everyone files a claim to avoid work
-  **b. On the fence** – has some cynicism but also believes some claims are legitimate
-  **c. Confused** – not certain what he/she should do when an employee files for an absence or how to accommodate
-  **d. Collaborative** – interacts with employees frequently, reaches out and does whatever is reasonable to help their employee return to work



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**Transitional Return-To-Work Partnership**

**Success Story**


- Claimant was out of work for surgery on their dominant hand.
- The vocational specialist educated the claimant & physician on the employer's TRTW program and discussed RTW plan.
- A release was obtained indicating a RTW with restrictions of no lifting more than 5 lbs. for 1 month.
- The vocational specialist contacted the employer to arrange job modifications.
- The claimant successfully RTW 1 month prior to the physician's original projected RTW date.

**Manufacturing Concerns:**  
**Eight out of ten** manufacturers are concerned about not being able to meet their talent demands over the next five years.

Unfilled job vacancies in the manufacturing industry are expected to create productivity losses of up to **\$2.5 trillion by 2028**.

**TRTW Program Development Results:**  
 HPAC identified musculoskeletal conditions and injuries as the main driver of disability incidence and durations and a TRTW program was implemented.

In partnership with the employer's HR team and on-site employee health clinic personnel, vocational resources identified claimants with sufficient capacity and paved the way for a progressive RTW plan resulting in **1,257 saved lost workdays, over \$222K in direct cost avoidance and over \$356K in indirect cost avoidance in the first year of the program.**



Confidential. Manufacturing customer, savings realized from May 1, 2021 through April 30, 2022.

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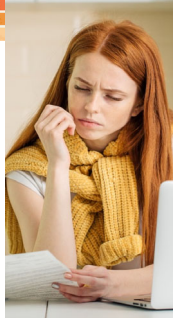

**RTW Homework**

**Profile:** Female professional employee with a sedentary job went out of work due to a severe chronic condition.

**Diagnosis:** The employee was treating for Lupus, which is an inflammatory disease caused when the immune system attacks its own tissues.

**Functional Impact:** The employee's condition was affecting her joints, making it painful for her to sit at her desk, utilizing a computer and keyboard all day.

**Symptoms:** She reported pain, swelling and stiffness in her wrists, fatigue throughout the day, and frequent headaches. She also shared that she was feeling anxious and stressed about her workload.

Source: Employer's TRTW Program Results, October 2021.

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**POLLING**


Based on the RTW story we just shared, pick the answer below that you think was the "right" RTW solution

A. Employee was transferred to another job in the onsite cafeteria where she was able to stand and walk all day, providing check out service to other employees who were purchasing their lunch.

B. Employee worked with her manager to create a gradual return to work schedule of 2 hours a day for one week, 4 hours a day for one week, until she was ramped up to full time. The transition plan back to work lasted a total of 8 weeks.

C. Employee stayed out of work for the maximum duration. She came back to work full time. She was provided with a sit/stand station and an ergonomic keyboard.

D. Employee was promoted into a senior leadership position so that she could delegate her work to other team members




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**Key Takeaways**

**Transitional Return to Work Programs:**

- Ensure consistent and equitable treatment practices
- Help avoid reputational and costly legal issues related to ADA compliance
- Streamline the employee and manager experience
- Have been successful with union groups
- Create a more positive work culture

**Create a customized program specific to your organization:**

- Identify accommodation opportunities for each job/department
- Provide ongoing manager training
- Collaborate with workers' compensation and disability vendors
- Centralize RTW process with appropriate skillset
- Monitor outcomes and barriers for continuous improvement




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Thank you!

Questions?




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