

POSITIVE CHANGES IN THE WORKPLACE



PEOPLE BEING ENCOURAGED TO RETURN-TO-WORK

Organisations are facing a tough hiring environment. There is a global shortage of mid-senior talent caused by hiring constraints and redundancies during the recession. As a result competition for experienced talent is particularly strong.

In order to source the talent they need, we are working with more and more organisations turning to alternative hiring paths as part of their overall talent acquisition and retention strategy.

Return-to-work programmes or 'returnships' that look to hire experienced people who have been out of the workforce for more than 2 years ('Returners') are proving particularly valuable as the long-term benefit to experienced organisational talent far outweighs the short-term investment.

People returning to work is great for business

People take a break from their careers for many reasons – alternative careers, education or skills development, family care roles, early retirement or other personal reasons. As a whole, this group represents a significant and experienced talent pool. By returning to work, they not only bring their prior experience, but also the benefit of broader experience from other industries, further education or simply life outside of work. We know diversity of experience strengthens both an inclusive culture and team performance. McKinsey's latest research on this (2017 Global Study) showed that across all industry groups, companies with more diverse management teams were 33% more likely to have top quartile financial, more effective innovation and value add performance over time than companies with more homogenous teams. At SEVEN, working with organisations who want to become more inclusive, we have seen positive change in how businesses are engaging returners in order to make their return a success.

Why is a specific return-to-work programme required?

The reality is that integrating people returning to work after some time out of the workforce presents challenges for both the returner and the hiring organisation. This challenge is simply not met by the development and skills programmes organisations may routinely offer their current employees. There are specific personal development, skills and knowledge gaps for returners to overcome and managers to support. However, with proper organisational and team support both during and after the transition back to the workplace, returners can thrive and quickly add value to their organisation.

How can you encourage talented returners to join and stay with your organisation?

1) Take a system-wide approach

The success of return to work initiatives is a systemic issue. As Business Psychologists, we partner with hiring organisations to reframe negative associations with career breaks and ensure that they access and develop diverse talent pools with a fair, inclusive and unbiased mindset. How do returners form part of your overall talent strategy? Consider the structure of your teams, the types of roles you create and skills you look for, hiring practices, the language you use during induction and how you plan out ongoing / future talent development initiatives. Education, workshops, team and manager coaching can be very helpful in creating a supportive environment for returners (and other diverse groups). While there is a major onus on each returner to embrace the opportunity to return to work, the entire system - boards, executive management, hiring managers, talent managers, line managers, team members - has a role to play in the success of those who return to work.



2) Even the playing field

Providing a dedicated, structured return-to-work programme from induction through the back to work transition gives returners a more even playing field with their colleagues. The purpose of these programmes should be to a) share knowledge about the industry and organization 2) quantify and address their skills and knowledge gaps 3) build confidence and offer opportunities for personal development.

3) Understand the role of confidence

From a psychological perspective, regardless of the reason or circumstances, transitions back into the workplace can trigger self-doubt, a sense of isolation and loss of professional identity for returners. Organisations who recognize this and managers who learn to intercept a returners' 'inner critic' can provide confidence-building support for Returners to positively manage their re-entry and be rewarded with trust and commitment from returners in their employment.

What do 'return-to-work programmes' typically include?

There is never a 'one size fits all' approach, as each organisation will seek different outcomes. However, typically these programmes involve:

- **Orientation:** Detailing roles available, organisational culture, expectations and hearing from executives and prior Returners about their experiences.
- **Practical tips:** CV and interview preparation, communication and presentation skills, insight and advice on developing a support network.
- **Self-awareness:** Personality and strengths profiling, with a view to understand how individuals can positively engage with others and be effective in future roles.
- **Development workshops:** Resilience, self esteem and confidence building - focusing on encouraging a 'growth mindset'.
- **Career development planning:** Articulating a clear personal purpose, mapping out and galvanising career goals.
- **Returnships:** Many organisations now offer formal 'Returnships' – internships for people returning to work after a career break. They are typically short term paid employment contracts with a possible ongoing move to a permanent contract after the internship. Although there are different ways to deliver a Returnships, the overall objective is to provide an opportunity to return to work, provide upskilling to ensure technical skills fit the requirements of the role as well as other training, coaching and confidence building so the returner is ready and equipped to return to their career at a senior and professional level.

- **Job offers:** Organisations offering Return to Work Programmes and Returnships generally want to hire experienced, skilled individuals ready to give their best to a new role or career.

Upon employment:

- **Ongoing development support:** Tailored knowledge and skills development opportunities during transition and an ongoing developmental roadmap.
- **Coaching:** Individual coaching for returners during transition and ideally hiring manager, line manager and team coaching for those engaging with and managing returners.
- **Mentoring:** The assignment of an individual mentor who is familiar with the organisation an advocate for returner. Group mentoring with fellow returners and/or other supportive people within the organisation.

Investing in your future leadership

Every organisation needs a balance of talent at every level in order to be effective. As organisations face a talent 'crunch' at mid-senior level, we believe return-to-work programmes provide real access to people with strong experience and the aptitude required to be successful as future leaders.

While we partner predominantly with organisations, we always look at the individuals perspective when co-creating programmes with clients. We also work directly with returners both in programme delivery and as individual coachees. From this, we know that returners will focus on opportunities with organisations that understand and support the unique challenges 'Returners' face after a period out of the workplace. Where there is no formal Returners Programme available, they will look for a well thought through and easily articulated development support system with opportunities to upskill, regular manager interaction and mentoring by others within the team or organisation.

In our experience, the time commitment to reignite the skills and talent of an experienced returner is relatively short – generally only months - compared to the years of training and development required for new graduates to impact an organisation similarly.

At SEVEN, we are excited to work with future-focused organisations that see real value in creating specific "Return to Work" induction & development programmes for this desired, yet often overlooked, talent pool returning to the workplace.

