NKU NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

BACK TO THE FUTURE...A REIMAGINED U

MANAGER PLAYBOOK 2.0

Human Resources Department
Summer/Fall 2021 & Beyond

Table of Contents

OVERVIEW

The year of COVID-19 has impacted many aspects of our lives, and NKU was able to quickly change how it engaged its student population, faculty and staff, and the community in which it serves. Consider what has been learned since then: masking and social distancing was the initial means of preventing the spread of the disease and now there is the availability of vaccinations, the agile capability of NKU workers has been tested and resulted in a continued focus on student success, and we continue to learn more about ourselves and grow in support of each other. Having experienced a year of working differently through the pandemic but recognizing that the emergence of the disease is not over, NKU is now pivoting *Back to the Future* by returning to a *Reimagined U*!

It cannot be emphasized enough about the important role that you play, as a supervisor / manager. As stated in the Fall 2020 Manager Playbook, you are key to how we successfully pivot into the future of NKU. Again, we ask that you not only model the way for how your direct reports are to show up on campus but to also be available, flexible, and empathetic as we continue to adjust and develop daily rhythms in how we are to function in this new environment. The environment of yester-year is different today and tomorrow, and the ask is that you continue to be available, flexible, and empathetic as many of our employees transition back to working fully on campus.

The purpose of this guide is to provide you with the tools and resources necessary to assist with managing your employees and your wellbeing during the Summer/Fall semesters and beyond.

(**Remember**: As new information is discovered or changes occur, there may be some aspects of this guide that require updating.)

WORKING IN THE NEW NORMAL

It is said that change is never easy, which would include the transition back to working on campus. For some employees, working on campus on a regular basis is a new experience. For others, it has been a year of either working remote, in some hybrid capacity, or no change in work location but having virtual or little to no in-person connection with other employees. It is during this time that there is importance in re-engaging employees and reconnecting to create or enhance the employee experience and sense of belonging.

As the supervisor, you are already tasked with ensuring that your team has clear expectations or their roles, a cadence of communication that allows for transparency, meaningful and thoughtful feedback and opportunity to provide you with feedback, and frequent assessments so that they are aware of their level of proficiency within their roles and accomplishment with meeting goals. Reconnecting with your team will help you to reassess where your employees are at this stage in their career to better support the team equitably and with equality in furtherance of their performance and re-establishment of the team dynamics, engagement, collaboration, and trust in the new normal. Do not fall into the trap of '*status quo bias*', which refers to the desire to maintain or get back to what one sees as the appropriate situation and same way of doing things (Cincinnati.com). So, how can you prepare to go back on campus in full capacity, what should be done once back on campus, and what should you do to help move the University forward? **CARE** – **LEAD** – **INNOVATE**!

Preparation for Return via CARE!

Create opportunities for your team to become comfortable with returning to campus. ('C' could also stand for 'communication'.) If possible, encourage those who are working remote to begin a slow transition by coming into the office a couple of days a week. Especially for those who are new to your department, ask for a peer to be a tour guide or buddy to assist the new employee get oriented to their new environment. Most of all, be open and positive to questions and critiques (positive or negative) about the return. For more information about returning to campus, refer to the NKU Home Page > Coronavirus > Resources > Campus Communications page.

Acknowledge and be open to the fact that some employees may want a change in how they used to work. With some employees having experienced working from home, you may find that some employees will want to continue to work remote in some capacity to be their most productive selves. You can be proactive with decisioning on the possible requests for remote work by reviewing the Flexible Work Arrangement Temporary Procedure and the Flexplace Arrangement Suitability Guide for information about work flexibility options and decisioning.

Reach out to your department head/dean to gain clarity on the expectations / rules around remote versus in-person work as a proactive measure. Depending upon the criteria as listed in the Suitability Guide, you may want to work with your leader to collaborate on how to work differently – more efficiently and with the employee in mind. If you would like to have the assistance with this collaboration, please refer to the Suitability Guide, resources listed in the Playbook, and/or reach out to Human Resources.

Ensure your team is aware of your support, dedication, and expectations of them and the department for the next chapter at NKU. It is about setting the tone for how to show up on campus, a greater level of engagement, and continued efforts towards advancing student success.
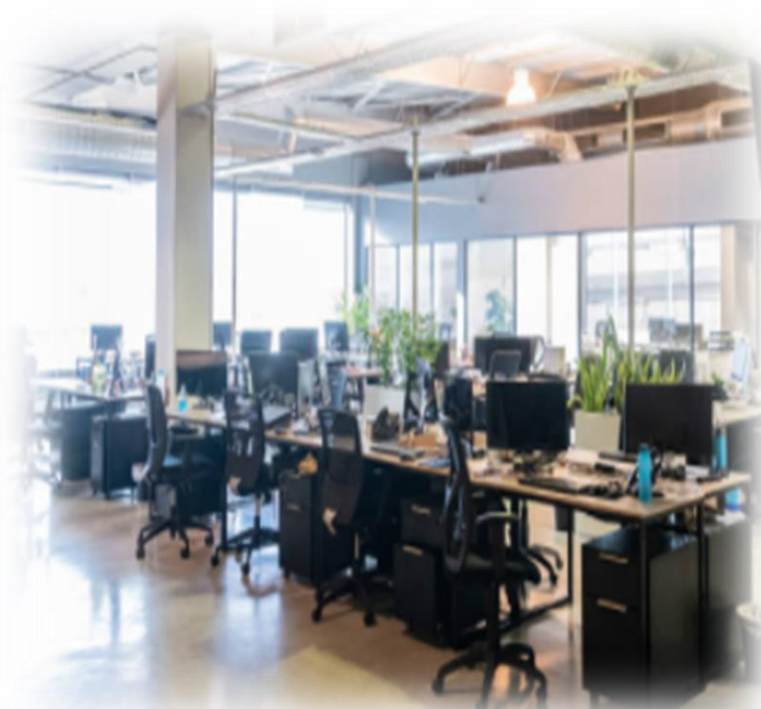
Once Back on Campus, LEAD!

Listen actively. Pay attention. What are your employees saying? What are they not saying? With active listening, it is important that you withhold judgment about what is being said as well as not provide any advice. Does the employee want you to act, give advice, or just listen? Yes, sometimes employees may just want to be heard and not need you to do anything but appreciate that they shared their thought or feelings with you and make a mental note.

Energize your team – individually and as a group! Burn-out, mental fatigue, and demotivation are even more evident as a result of the pandemic. With returning back to the office, consider what you can do to ensure that people want to come back to the office. One way to energize your team is rather simple: Greet (say "hi") or check on them daily or at least every other day. Research shows that one of the greatest offenses of leaders is the lack of communication / emotional intelligence. In the past, how often did you walk around the office (or emailed, instant messaged) to even know if your employees were in the office, appeared motivated, or saw that you cared about them professionally and personally? The Interact/Harris Poll shows that 51% of employees felt that their leaders refused to even talk to subordinates as an issue. One of the qualities of being a great leader is being attentive. Take the time to say "Good morning (afternoon/evening)! How's it going?" to your folks.

"…**A**ccept the things that you cannot change, the courage to change the things that you can change, and [build or use] the wisdom to know the difference." This saying is part of the serenity prayer and a gift that will enable you to effectively manage and lead your team as it pertains to your personal wellbeing. Think about it: how do you feel when you worry a lot about something? Does it impact you physically or psychologically in some way? Do you become very critical of your abilities that then impacts your effectiveness or decisioning? Reflect and continue to learn and grow to be the manager and leader that your team and the University needs you to be. You are highly encouraged to take advantage of the tools and resources listed later in this Playbook.

Demonstrate and build the trust of your team and appreciate their diversity. Get to know your team in this new environment via 1x1 meetings, team meetings, team building, etc. You may need to re-establish relationships or build relationships, particularly with those employees with whom you have yet to work in-person with on a consistent basis or have not had a great distance relationship. This may also be a great opportunity to have a "stay interview" with each employee to increase your awareness about your employees individually and as a group. Recognize that each employee is different and there is a difference between equal and equity. Just be clear on your decisioning and explain the "why" behind decisions.

Innovate refers to…

- make changes in something established, especially by introducing new methods, ideas, or products (Oxford Languages)
- to do something in a new way; to have new ideas about how something can be done (Merriam-Webster dictionary)
- to introduce something new; make changes in anything established (dictionary.com)

One of NKU's Core Values states…

"We will approach our work—how we teach, engage and serve—with creativity and *innovation*."

Another meaningful term is ***Competitive Advantage***, which refers to…

… what makes a customer choose your business over another one. By understanding, and promoting such advantage, companies can win a greater amount of market share (airfocus.com)

Examples of competitive advantage include…

- Your team
- The product or service that no one else can offer
- Brand and reputation

As a manager of people, products, and services, what are you doing to ensure that NKU has the competitive advantage? Are you including your team as part of the discussion? Are your ideas moving us forward or are they much of the same thing that has always been done? What does your team's "stay interviews" say? What is your team communicating to you about how they work or want to work? Are there inefficiencies, products, and/or services that need the attention of you and your team?

A great way to engage the team and promote inclusiveness is to innovate together!

MANAGING CONVERSATIONS RELATED TO RETURNING TO CAMPUS

We as humans are emotional beings and, at times, do not do well in times of change. Having experienced, becoming accustomed, or having developed a regular routine to/while working remote has created a level of anxiety, tension, or even anger about transitioning from a remote to an in-person work environment. There is also the realization that employees will either have all, part, or none of the benefits of a Flexible Work Arrangement (FWA) procedure, specifically Flexplace and Flextime options, which may have an impact on employee morale.

This section, as well as the Resources section, provides guidance with managing potential issues that may arise due to the transition to an in-person work environment. The options are not static but are there to help with determining how to best communicate with your employees.

Scenario 1 – When You Don't Know the Answer

- **Option 1**: We are all in this together, and there are some questions that are still outstanding or that I may not know the answer. Please give me some time to find the answer and get back with you soon.

- **Option 2**: This experience is new to us all. Let me reach out to _____ and get that answer for you.

- **Option 3**: I understand (/empathize with) your concern and appreciate you sharing. Let me see what I can find out for you.

Scenario 2 – Concern About Vaccination

- **Option 1**: I totally understand the concern about non-vaccinated employees. Coming back to campus with the uncertainty of who has or has not been vaccinated can make anyone uneasy. Do know that your health and safety is of the utmost importance to NKU and the decision to bring everyone back was thoughtfully considered. We are listening to the recommendations of the CDC and highly encourage all those who have not been vaccinated and anyone who want to wear a mask. Also know that I will support you, when I can, when you have concerns of safety. We can certainly have those conversations and can bring _____ into the conversation as well, if needed. For now, let's agree that we will work together and communicate as we return to campus. (Gain agreement.)

- **Option 2**: Thank you for sharing your concerns. Know that the issues around vaccinations have not been taken lightly and are a topic of discussion for leadership. We are following the recommendations of the CDC and will continue to monitor the situation and make updates to NKU's expectations and rules when changes arise. If you decide that you want to wear a mask in the office, I will fully support that decision. If there are things that we can do in the office, please let's have a discussion about it and you can also refer to the NKU webpage to learn more about how NKU is [Remaining Committed to Staying Healthy@NKU](link).

Scenario 3 – Unable to (Fully) Grant FWA Request

Your efforts (and/or cooperation) this past year has been greatly appreciated. As you know, NKU is really focused on creating an in-person engaged campus and Human Resources has provided some guidance in determining if a request is feasible. At this time, I will not be able to approve your request.

- **Option 1**: However, there may be something else that we can do to allow you to work remote (or change your work start / end time). (Begin to collaborate on options as listed in the Flexible Work Arrangement procedure. Come to an agreement. Ask employee to resubmit request.)

- **Option 2**: Because this may be related to a personal issue (e.g., self or family illness, etc.), the more appropriate option may be a medical leave through FMLA or an accommodation through ADA. Please reach out to Human Resources for more information about these options.

- **Option 3**: I empathize and realize that an allowance has been made to work remote during this past year, which was under very extraordinary circumstances for all universities. Let's talk about the expectations of your role and department. (Walk through what is expected of this role and how it aligns with departmental and University goals.) After careful consideration, and we really considered all aspects of your request, working remote is just not an option for this role. Your role is essential to in-person engagement on campus. Do know that you are a valued member of this team and this decision does not, in any way, diminish that fact.

- **Option 4**: Let me share with you the criteria listed and the department's stance on FWA. (Share the criteria.) In this case, I have looked at the numbers in terms of your productivity and find that the best option would be see if those numbers can be improved by returning fully on campus. We may be able to revisit this decision at a later date, but it's important that we really do all that we can to ensure that we are an engaged campus.

- **Option 5**: Everyone has done a really good job under the circumstances of this past year, and I recognize that there have been many successes. (You can call-out any successes of this employee as an example.) I realize that this wasn't the decision that you were looking for and totally empathize with how you may be feeling. Let me share with you the stance of the division (department/unit) and why that decision was made. (Share the information.) So, for now, that is how we have to work, and I look forward to us really working hard and creating a more engaged campus.

Scenario 4 – Not Abiding By FWA

I want to talk to you about the Flexible Work Arrangement and how it is going. What are your thoughts? (Listen. Learn what you can about what is taking place that is a barrier(s) to the employee abiding by the FWA.)

Option 1: I appreciate you acknowledging that there is a problem. Let's talk about next steps. (Collaborate with employee on revising or terminating the agreement. If revising is an option, then communicate that this will be a pilot to evaluate the status of abiding by the revised FWA in the next 30 days. If terminating, agree upon last date of the FWA will be in effect.)

Option 2: I appreciate you acknowledging that there is a problem. Can you share what is taking place that has prevented you from following the agreement? (Listen. Learn what you can. Understand that the cause may be personal and the employee may not want to share.) Let's talk about next steps. (Collaborate with employee on revising or terminating the agreement. If revising is an option, then communicate that this will be a pilot to evaluate the status of abiding by the revised FWA in the next 30 days. If terminating, agree upon last date of the FWA will be in effect.)

Option 3: Let me share with you what I have observed. (Share what <u>behavior</u> you have observed that illustrates that the employee is not abiding by the FWA. This conversation is not to be a personal attack on character but is about behavior.) Can you share what is taking place that is preventing you from abiding by the agreement? (Listen. Learn what you can. Understand that the cause may be personal and the employee may not want to share.) Let's talk about next steps. (Collaborate with employee on revising or terminating the agreement. If revising is an option, then communicate that this will be a pilot to evaluate the status of abiding by the revised FWA in the next 30 days. If terminating, agree upon last date of the FWA will be in effect.)

- **Option 1 – Not a full understanding resistance**: Help me to understand the difficulty with coming back to campus? (Listen. Gain insight into the problem. Is there anything that you can assist with? Is it too personal for the employee to share? Is there an opportunity to show empathy for the employee's situation? Is the situation escalating? Refer to one of the below options or any of the other scenario options, depending on the tone of the conversation.)

- **Option 2 – Still opportunity to come back**: As you know, there have been communications about our return to campus, and I know that this transition to working back on campus is not necessarily a preferred change. But it is a necessary change long talked about, and we need to do all that we can to successfully make that transition as seamless as possible for our customers (/ students). I value all of your hard work this past year and really need your help over this coming year. I also would really appreciate if you could be onboard with our push to be back on campus. (Seek agreement.) Any questions?

- **Option 3 – Really strong expression**: I really appreciate how strongly you feel about transitioning back on campus. The intent was not to make anyone's life difficult, but we really need to think about the business of student success and how we want to show up for our customers. How we are choosing to show up is with your role be present on campus (fully / most of the time). This has nothing to do with your work because you do a great job. What I am asking for is your support in how we want and need to support the University. (Seek agreement.) Any questions?

- **Option 4 – Need to step away for a moment / reset**: I am really sorry that you are unhappy with the decision and do think that this conversation has taken a wrong turn. How about if we table this discussion for now and talk later when we can talk about our next steps? (Seek agreement.) I'll set something up for us to talk at a later date, but in the meantime, let's continue to work towards a seamless transition back on campus. (Seek agreement. Be sure to follow through on setting up another meeting. May want to connect with your manager or Human Resources for advice on conversation, if necessary.) Any questions?

- **Option 5 – Conversation has become unmanageable**: Your support would really be great during this time of transition. What I don't want to have happen is that you negatively impact the success of the team, department, and University because you are unhappy with having to now work back on campus. I understand and am empathetic, but we have to do what is best for the University. Your role is essential to in-person engagement on campus. Are you able to get onboard with the plan to come back on campus and be supportive? (Seek agreement. May need to connect with your manager or Human Resources for advice on conversation or disciplinary action, if necessary.) Any questions?

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RESOURCES

Category	Resource	Location/Vendor
Return to the Office	[7 Crucial Tips for Managers Preparing For A Post-COVID Workplace](#) by Julian Lute	Great Place to Work Institute
	[Opinion: Companies Mess Up Post-Pandemic Return to Office](#) by Gleb Tsipursky	Cincinnati.com
	[How to Bring Employees Back To Work After The](#) Pandemic by Eric Friedman	Forbes
Challenging / Difficult Conversations	[Top 5 - Difficult Conversation Mistakes](#) by Skill Boosters	YouTube
	[5 Tips to Having Difficult Conversations with Employees](#) by Kate Volman	YouTube
	[How to Have Tough Conversations About Returning to the Office](#) by Liane Davey	Harvard Business Review
	[How to Deal with Difficult People](#) by Jay Johnson	YouTube; TEDxLivoniaCCLibrary
Trust	[Do You Really Trust Your Team? (And Do They Trust You?)](#) by Amy Jen Su	Harvard Business Review
	[5 Steps for Building Trust in the Workplace](#) by Betsy Allen Manning	Association for Talent Development
	[Trusting Teams: The 5 Practices](#) by Simon Sinek	YouTube
	[Building Trust Inside Your Team: Ways to Improve Team Cohesion](#)	MindTools
Employee Engagement	[Fearing A Chaotic Post-Pandemic Workplace? Fix It by Going All In On This 1 Thing](#) by Rebecca Weintraub and Steven Lewis	FastCompany
	[3 ways to create a work culture that brings out the best in employees](#) by Chris White	YouTube; TEDxAtlanta

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