

# WHAT'S NORMAL?

## A HOW-TO GUIDE TO HITTING YOUR HR STRIDE AGAIN.

Two economists with the National Bureau of Economic Research studied the past three American economic recessions and came to a sobering conclusion: 88% of the routine, easily automated jobs that were eliminated between the first recession in the mid-1980s and the Great Recession of 2009 disappeared within 12 months of a recession. Ostensibly, automation, blended roles, and entirely new jobs replaced them. Post-recession workplaces looked and acted drastically different than their former selves almost overnight.

The Great Disruption (or #rona), as our current situation is being dubbed, will likely join the list of recessions, at least as far as finance and HR departments are concerned. Over 20 million Americans have already filed unemployment due to job loss or furlough, and economists have said that 36 million of today's jobs are at risk of being eliminated or overhauled based on historical precedent.

So, as an HR leader, how do you manage your rapidly changing workplace? Nothing will be the same when business reopens, but careful preparation and planning can make your company's new normal feel, well, *normal*.

- 1. Make the tough calls early.** Work with department supervisors to identify essential personnel and positions which can be easily eliminated or automated, and then model your new costs and expected productivity levels before unleashing your plan of action. Rinse and repeat until you feel good about the expected outcome.
- 2. Write new job descriptions.** It's thinkable that old job descriptions won't accurately describe new, blended positions. To avoid confusion, discontent, and possible Fair Labor Standards Act violations (like improperly classifying exempt and nonexempt workers), update all job descriptions and have your legal team review them. Ask employees to review and sign their new job description when hired or re-hired.
- 3. Review your recruiting and recall process.** Work with your recruitment team to create a recall and recruiting process that is manageable and can meet department hiring timelines. Chances are good that your recruiting department took a hit when hiring slowed, so if you need more (or differently skilled) recruiters, hire them quickly. Without the right recruiting team, your ability to hire the rest of the workers you need suffers exponentially.
- 4. Consider using "temps."** Consider filling some spots with temporary workers so you can easily flex your headcount if business demand surprises you. Temporary staffing providers are typically the first businesses to be hit by an economic slump and the first to recover. If your preferred provider closed its doors or you've never worked with a staffing company, do your due diligence now to find a provider who is a good fit and start working out a pricing contract so the staffing team can hit the ground running if or when you place an order.
- 5. Create a strong onboarding program.** Recalled workers *and* new workers alike will enter your workplace with trepidation. For recalled workers, the walls may look the same but everything else—roles, responsibilities, and co-workers—might be different; and, for new workers, everything is brand new. Design a calendar-based onboarding program for every department so workers are reintroduced to the environment together and can learn to feel comfortable again. **View our post-closure timeline [here](#).**

**And, most importantly, expect something to fail.** Even with the most careful planning, something will go wrong, and you have to react quickly. Unlike periods of smooth economic activity when you have time to carefully consider options without injuring your business, the periods after business shocks require a nimble nature—especially in a post-pandemic environment where there's an ever-present threat of the virus's return.

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