



# HACKATHON



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A **COVID-19** Virtual Ideation Experience

**Team Topic and Number: Workplace Wellbeing Team 8**

**Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable): n/a**

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**Input your submission below. Please remember that you have 1500 words to share your insights.**

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# Mental Wellness and Reintegration

## INTRODUCTION

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Home-based working has brought many positive results into the way we work and interact with one-another. However, the covid-19 epidemic has forced many to become overwhelmed with feelings of worry, stress, disconnection, and isolation. An organization's role in sustaining the future wellbeing of their employees is more important now than ever.

Organizations can best care for their employee's overall well-being across three major spheres:

- Personal Wellness
- Social Wellness
- Workplace Wellness

Introducing effective wellbeing practices into the culture and workplace of an organization, real estate professionals will improve the mental health of the workforce and help workers to reintegrate into an environment of long-lasting success.

## PERSONAL WELLNESS - MINDFULNESS

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When most people think of personal wellness, they typically focus on the physical portion of personal health and fitness. Although these are important, it is only a portion of their overall personal wellness. For the purpose of our focus, we are going to hone in on mindfulness.

The mindfulness focus of personal wellness is the key to reintegration into the workplace and the starting point for all successful reintegration plans. Unlike our IQ (intelligence quotient), our EQ (emotional quotient) is a part of our personal wellness that we can easily work on and improve.

The best way to improve our EQ is to take "microsteps" – these are steps that are "too small to fail" ...

With so much uncertainty today, it is easy to focus on everything out of our control – which is why one of the most important microsteps is self-grounding (also known as centering), which ties into gratitude.

How do we self-ground?

- **FOCUS ON GRATITUDE**  
With so much uncertainty, one of the easiest ways to ground ourselves right now is by focusing on gratitude.
- **CREATE A JOURNAL**  
Start a gratitude or other type of journal before going to bed each night, or immediately upon waking. (e.g. list 3 or more things that you are grateful for each day.)
- **REFRAME YOUR THINKING**  
Self-grounding helps to reform and reshape our minds and take those items of uncertainty and reframe the way that we think about them into more positive thoughts.

Another microstep towards personal wellness is mindful breathing. Breathing is an automated function, controlled by our brains, and it is a function that we can't live without. By taking control of our breathing and practicing mindful breathing, we remind ourselves that we are in control of our bodies, and we can control the flow of oxygen into our cells.

- **TAKE A BREATH**

Take a deep breath in through your nose for eight seconds, hold it for eight seconds, and breath out of your mouth for eight seconds, repeat this ten times.

- **BE IN THE MOMENT**

This mindful breathing exercise is clinically proven to reduce stress and assist in programming our brains to "be in the moment".

The last microstep to discuss in our limited personal wellness time is to recognize that to focus upward and onward, we must first focus inward.

- **FOCUS INWARD**

This age of social distancing, even as we start rolling back some layers of quarantine are going to continue – there are things that are simply out of our control, by focusing on the other two microsteps, we can focus inward – which will control our onward and upward reactions.

- **EXERCISE MEDITATION**

By conducting a quiet two-minute grounding meditation exercise, people can clear their minds of previous brain activities and mentally and emotionally prepare themselves better for their new tasks.

- **CREAT A CALM PRESENCE**

As we return to the workplace and focus onward and upward, let's remember to project that aura of cool calm presence. EQ can be contagious, and our personal wellness as we reintegrate socially can have a butterfly effect on all we communicate with.

## **SOCIAL WELLNESS - EMPATHY**

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As we move back into the workplace, there are new obligations to address. We must now care for the health and safety of employees, address new operating protocols, and comply with new government regulations. By introducing new work practices and social norms that center on empathy, organizations can improve the mental being of their employees and reduce the risks associated with workforce reintegration.

- **CONDUCT A SOCIAL SURVEY**

The usefulness of a survey provides a baseline understanding of how employees feel about reintegrating back into the office and what will make them feel safe, as well as how collaboration with teams could look like now and in the future.

- **REDUCE TIMELY MEETINGS**

Be mindful of people's time when scheduling meetings by giving space to prepare and also digest information. Sending an agenda ahead of time to allow employees prepare mentally and physically especially if these are long meetings or trainings. Collaborate and encourage more people to share experiences, best practices to learn from each other.

Practice of acceptance by respecting the person who is speaking, listen even though you

might initially disagree with their ideas. Innovation happens through diversity of thought and skill sets.

- **PROMOTE HEALTHY CONNECTIONS**

Social connections can influence our biology and well-being. Support and implement social activities and volunteer programs to connect people on different levels. Employers can offer support groups that help build a community within workplace spaces that encourage open communication, trust and team building. Practice compassion for people who may be experiencing personal emotional challenges. Create an environment of safety and protection for one another. Monitor your internal mental, physical and emotional state as you work with others, and encourage them to do the same in a safe and productive way.

- **ENCOURAGE CASUAL COLLISIONS – BEST PRACTICES**

Casual collisions are those typical break room and hallway interactions you have during a typical workday. When working virtually, it is important to be more intentional with social interactions. Here are some best practices for maintaining social ad-hoc interaction:

- Set a daily reminder to reach out to someone just to see how they're doing
- Have virtual happy hours
- Post a silly question of the day for your teammates
- Spend a few minutes sharing personal lives before launching into the work
- Have a virtual coffee break or lunch with others
- Call someone you work with but haven't heard from in awhile
- Don't forget to ask for help when you need it and offer help to others who are struggling!

## **WORKPLACE WELLNESS - TRANSFORMATION**

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As companies are figuring out how to reintegrate the workforce into the workplace, the built environment is undergoing a significant transformation. This transformation should not merely focus on physical wellbeing, but also take a long-term approach to fostering mental health and wellness.

- **WORKPLACE WELLNESS IS NO LONGER AN OPTION**

Wellbeing will become a standard and no longer a nice-to-have. This includes WELL Building, Fitwel building certification, and others. Key features of these include ventilation and air filtration, new cleaning protocols, biophilic design, and health maintenance practices. A key piece of mental wellness includes the feeling of safety and comfort you provide to others by sharing how the workplace is transforming to protect their long-term health and safety.

- **INCORPORATE WELLNESS DESIGN**

Future workplace design will see more agile space, activity based, and mix of space types. It will also see an acceleration of healthy building investments in maintenance resources, building services and compliance with evolving building or engineering codes.

- **TRANSFORM LANGUAGE**

Leaders will re-align their thinking and use of terms to alleviate feeling of being left out. For example – using language like work-from-anywhere or distributed work, rather than-working-from-home or remote, helps virtual workers feel safe and needed. Terminology like remote indicates there are places where employees are less important or relevant. Work from Anywhere is another way to define remote work will alleviate this feeling.

- **UTILIZE NEW TECHNOLOGY**

Work from anywhere will spur innovation in collaboration tools, virtual desktops and

application streaming. Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence and Big Data will support meeting scheduling, seat assigning, facility management, and tracking of building performance. To support safety and mental health during reintegration, new types of workplace sensors and personal phone apps will be used for building entries, worker health assessments, compliance protocols, wayfinding solutions, social distancing, and other aspects of complying with our post-covid new ways of working.

- **INCORPORATE RISK MITIGATION**

Develop a set of exposure and risk principles (i.e., hierarchy of hazard controls) creating a multi-layer strategy to reduce risks enough to allow your employees to feel safe and trusting to come to the office.

## **CONCLUSION**

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People matter most and are the most important resource of any business. Their mental health is a key component to the overall health and wellbeing of an organization. Place matters, and plays a key role in supporting the personal, social and workplace health of the corporate environment. By modeling, sharing and designing for the practices of mindfulness, CRE groups will be a key resource for nurturing the mental health of the workers as we reintegrate in the post-covid 19 workplace. We believe that CoreNet's hackathon project is using speed, innovation and thought leadership to provide the tools and ideas which will permanently transform the way we work.