

# HR:Return strategy

“Return-to-work” implies a going back to where we were. Is there a “going-back” or are we simply moving toward a whole new reality?

In conversation with human resource leaders across the U.S., Boyden's Steve Nilsen explores cross-sector return-to-work strategies.

**Nilsen: Is there a “going-back”?** **Allred:** We are moving towards a new reality. I don't think we will ever go back to the way things were. I think many roles will move to full-time remote or at least partial remote with only limited jobs being full-time in an office.

**Nilsen: What are the biggest changes you have implemented to continue operating? In your return-to-work plan, what will remain as a COVID-19 legacy?** **Allred:** We have changed our whole way of working; for now, no visitors, everyone is wearing masks, no travel, all meetings are via video and not in person. Everything is different. It is hard to say what will remain. I hope we will reach a point where we can have in-person meetings and not wear masks, but it is too soon to tell.

**Nilsen: What metrics are you tracking to help guide your organization's return-to-work? Are you implementing new related internal metrics?** **Allred:** No metrics at this time. We are relying on manager feedback, surveys and employee input.

**Nilsen: In what new ways are you using technology in your return-to-work strategy?** **Allred:** Technology is less a part of our return-to-work and more a part of our stay-at-home strategy. We are looking at interactive tools to make experiences more personal and help people feel more connected from home.

**Nilsen: What do you anticipate will be the greatest obstacle in the return-to-work phase?** **Allred:** People feeling safe. The number of cases is still increasing so many do not feel safe in an office environment. Until the numbers go down, we won't be ready to have many employees back in the office. School is also a big factor. Without school or childcare options, people can't come back.

**Nilsen: What is your greatest learning from this so far, and what advice would you offer as we continue to navigate these uncharted waters?** **Allred:** Flexibility. We have to be flexible. We have to let go of past practices and be open to new ways of doing things. We have seen higher productivity, deadlines met and teams coming together. These are all things we were concerned about and we have been pleasantly surprised by the results.

*In conversation with:*



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**States of operation:** NC, AL,  
TN, SC, NY, CA

**Operations outside U.S.:**  
Canada

**Number of employees:**  
approx. 1500 employees; less  
than 450 are impacted by  
working from home. The  
remaining employees  
continued working in an  
adjusted environment in the  
manufacturing plants and  
distribution centers.

**by Steve Nilsen**  
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