

THE MOVING FORWARD  
TOGETHER PODCAST:

# Returning to the Workplace



DR. DYLAN ROSS

On the first episode of the Optum Moving Forward Together podcast, Dr. Dylan Ross spoke to Dr. Monika Roots, Chief Medical Officer of Sanvello, about returning to the workplace. They covered what emotions we can expect to come up when returning to the workplace and how to cope with them, ways to navigate reconnecting with co-workers, and tips for managers who want to help ease the transition for their teams.



DR. MONIKA ROOTS

### Key Takeaways:

- It is important to build your mental health muscles now in preparation for returning to the workplace. Find a grounding technique that works for you and start practising it now.
- Because COVID-19 has brought mental health to the forefront, managers have an opportunity right now to be intentional and supportive so that their employees can grow as human beings but also as a cohesive group.
- Managers set the tone for returning to work. To help the team ease back in, acknowledge feelings they might be having, set clear expectations, and focus on listening to and supporting each individual employee.

### Tips and Techniques for Individuals:

- **Gratitude journal:** Try keeping a gratitude journal to reflect on and appreciate the small things that make your days better.
- **Grounding item:** Find an item that calms you down, such as a smooth rock or a bracelet sprayed with a calming scent. Bring that item with you wherever you go and focus on it when you feel stressed or anxious.

- **Name your feelings:** When you have a negative feeling such as anxiety, call it something funny like Bob or Jill or Jack and say, “Stop, Bob.” This will help you pull yourself out of that feeling.
- **5, 4, 3, 2, 1:** Name five things you can see, four things you can feel, three things you can hear, two things you can smell and one thing you can taste. This can help you tap into your senses and bring yourself back into your body.
- **Stop sign:** Close your eyes and visualise a stop sign. Describe it to yourself. What does it look like? How many sides does it have? This can help you stop your thoughts and bring you into the moment.

### Tips and Techniques for Managers:

- **Put your own mask on first:** Just as in-flight safety demonstrations tell you to put your own mask on before assisting others, managers need to make sure they are taking care of themselves in order to be of service to others.
- **Set the tone:** Let your team know what they can expect when coming back to the workplace and acknowledge that this transition may be difficult. Practise self-care at work to show your employees that this is acceptable and encouraged.
- **Hold a virtual welcome back party:** A virtual welcome back party can help pair what people have become accustomed to in the past months – virtual meetings – with an acknowledgement of the shift to going back into the office
- **Got your back:** Set up a jar or box in your office and ask employees to put in a slip of paper each morning to rate how they are feeling that day. This will help you understand how the team is feeling overall, acknowledge that mental health is an important part of each person’s day, provide anonymity and bring the team together to support one another.
- **Take a LAP:** LAP stands for Listen, Act and Pause. Be intent on really hearing what your employees are saying. Then, act on it. Think about how you can actively help support your employee. Finally, pause. Take a moment to reflect on your own emotions before responding.

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