

Line Manager Tips for Success

Increase Retention & Boost Performance Post Career Break



The first two tips relate to how you operate:

1. Transition mindset

Treat the so called 'off-ramping' period (the time when a career breaker prepares to go on leave) and 'on-ramping' period (the time when a career breaker prepares to return) as **times of transition** rather than an event that takes place on a single day. A transition means a period of adjustment from one way of being to another. This is particularly important when someone is returning to the workplace after an extended leave doing something different to the role he or she is returning to (for example, after maternity leave where days have been spent caring for young children).

2. Ask and get it 'right'

Demonstrate a desire to get things 'right' by asking your leaver/returner what she/he would like or needs from you at various stages (e.g. how much and what type of contact whilst he/she is away). Be on the front-foot and make suggestions about what you think might be appropriate with the caveat that they are only suggestions and you are keen to hear what he/she thinks. For example, you might say *"It could be an option for you to do a phased return over a couple of weeks, what do you think?"* You don't have to have all the answers as a line manager; you just need to demonstrate a commitment to finding them.

The remaining eight tips are practical things you can do to make a positive difference:

3. Send a positive signal

Send your leaver a personal card during the break to remind him/her that you're looking forward to them coming back. If your colleague is on maternity leave, send a copy of *Mothers Work! How to Get a Grip on Guilt and Make a Smooth Return to Work* by Jessica Chivers (Hay House, 2011) direct from Amazon to reinforce the message 'I want you back.' This isn't a replacement for the formal process of managing a maternity leave, it's one human being reassuring another in a possibly difficult and uncertain time.



"This is THE book employers should be giving all their Women Returners."
Professor Karen J. Pine

4. Be inclusive

Send invitations to away days, team lunches and any other activity your colleague has said she's interested in and underline that you know her head may well be in another space entirely and it's acceptable not to respond to your contact.

5. Praise it

Share praise or give recognition whilst your colleague is away for things s/he has contributed to, such as client feedback, internal stakeholder comments, a successful launch of a process/initiative she was involved in. Equally, when your colleague has returned, regularly remind him/her of strengths and point to times you've seen them in action. Suggesting new ways he/she could use them to give him/her a stretch and get closer to the career aspirations shared with you.

6. Get your KIT together

Highlight keep in touch (KIT) days for maternity leavers as a way to help ease her transition back into the workplace and make suggestions on what could happen on those occasions.

7. Build a plan for success

Talk about returning to work being a period of transition and discuss what a successful first month will look like. Be explicit about how your expectations of him/her during this time differ from the quality and quantity of output before he/she went on leave. Co-creating a 90 day plan could be useful.

8. Be interested and empathetic

For colleagues returning from a maternity/paternity or caring leave, ask about life at home and show interest in the family. First thing in the morning and before going home are good times to turn the conversation to life beyond work. Share your own experiences, if applicable, to legitimise your returner's feelings and experiences. For maternity leavers in particular, watch out for exhaustion and encourage her to leave early in the first few weeks – acknowledge the mental demands of effectively being a new starter on top of coping with broken nights' sleep.

9. Weekly 1:1s

Weekly 1:1s may be more than both of you are used to and it's likely this will be helpful in the beginning. Let your colleague be the one to reduce the amount of contact you have. Ideally each 1:1 will be a short meeting (around 45 minutes) focused on progress against his/her 90 day plan/PDP or equivalent.

10. Comeback coaching

Offer access to a career coach (who is skilled in maternity/paternity transitions) and position it as *"because I've heard it makes a difference and I think you would embrace the opportunity it brings"* to assuage any concern it may signal low confidence in her competency. Coaching time allows your colleague to talk about their life in the round and create solutions to personal and professional challenges that are not always comfortably discussed with a line manager.

>> There are more positive prompts for managers in our *Managing Maternity Returners: A Manager's Guide to a Smooth Transition*. See <http://talentkeepers.co.uk/line-manager>



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