

Soft Landings

Creating an environment of psychological safety to support employees' emotional wellbeing

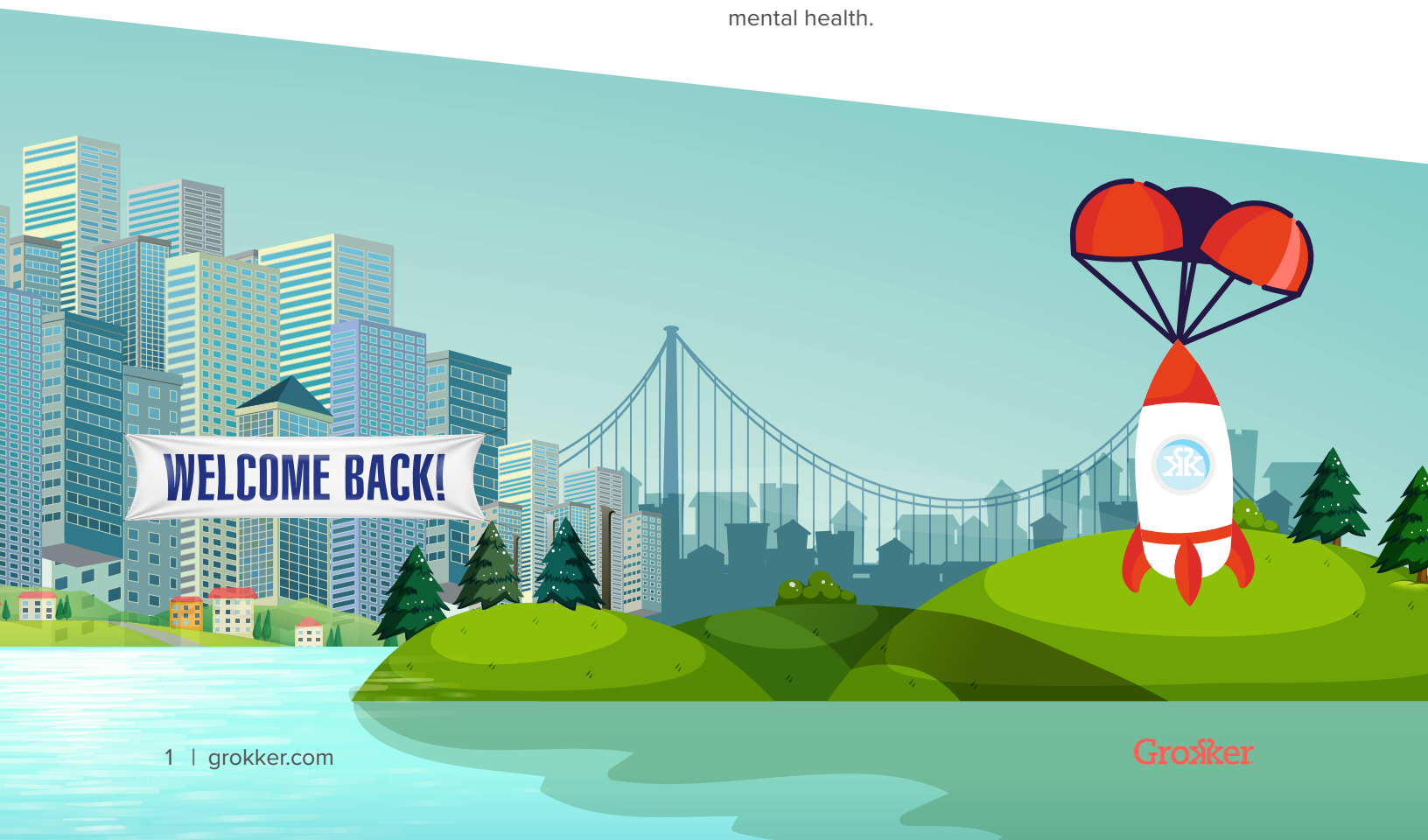
Feelings of trust, comfort, and safety are characteristic of emotionally secure employees, and they're most certainly inherent in a sense of wellbeing. So when it comes to supporting your workforce in the post-pandemic workplace, one of the most powerful things you can do is cultivate an environment of psychological safety.

What is psychological safety?

Amy Edmondson, Harvard Business School Professor, defines psychological safety as a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes. This belief empowers an employee to show up as their authentic self and to turn to their manager and teammates for help overcoming challenges, from interpersonal conflicts to work/life overwhelm. If a person is fearful of retaliation or believes that expressing vulnerability with others makes them "look bad," they simply can't — and probably won't — get the support they need to move forward in an emotionally healthy way.

Psychological safety matters now more than ever

Many employees are anxious about returning to the office, struggling to cope with stress related to their health and safety, social interactions, and ongoing disruption to their routines. A psychologically safe work environment will help them transition into their post-pandemic reality more successfully. Yet less than half of workers (46%) feel comfortable talking with their manager about mental health/emotional wellbeing, according to Grokker Innovation Labs research. What's more, only 18% of Joblist survey respondents said their company's culture greatly encourages them to speak up about their stress, a stunning insight considering the impact of stress on mental health.



The psychological safety checklist

Follow these guidelines to help prepare for a comfortable, psychologically safe re-entry to the workplace — and keep them going to establish a greater sense of psychological safety across your workforce culture:

- Make achieving workforce psychological safety a priority amongst your organization's leadership team.
- Identify practices or norms that might be getting in the way of employees feeling like they're in a safe, caring environment. Closed office doors and a tolerance for overwork are two examples. Start thinking about ways to improve moving forward.
- Include employees in the re-entry planning process. Launch a survey, hold a town hall meeting, or ask managers to check-in personally with employees (another great step towards establishing physiological safety, incidentally!).
- Share your organizations' plans to support employees' mental health and emotional wellbeing as they return to the office — and beyond.
- Explicitly tell employees that more change is imminent. By setting the expectation that flexibility is the new norm, they may feel less threatened by the current situation.
- Use phrases like, "thanks to your feedback," or "employees have shared" in your re-entry communications so it's clear that employee sentiments were part of the planning process.
- Think of ways to enforce emotionally supportive behaviors from managers, such as building them into MBOs.
- Implement a peer reward system for employees who identify caring behaviors in others.
- Express gratitude frequently, formally and informally, to spread a spirit of gratitude and positivity.
- Demonstrate a growth mindset when delivering uncomfortable information or giving critical feedback.
- Provide different ways for employees to connect with one another. It might be easier for someone to express their feelings about a situation via email or instant messaging, rather than over a video call.
- Be sure to include full-time remote employees in your plans to welcome office-based employees back to the worksite so everyone feels included in the "next normal."
- Listen actively to employees when they share ideas and concerns, creating feedback loops for follow-up and ongoing conversations.
- Set up special office hours in which employees can contact HR with re-entry questions.
- Lead by example. When executives and managers open up about their own apprehensions, they help normalize challenging feelings and the act of sharing them with others at work.

About Grokker

Grokker is the award-winning wellbeing engagement solution that empowers employees to take control of their physical and emotional health with personalized programs and a caring community of experts to encourage them all along the way. Grokker's proprietary whole person approach integrates and inspires with our proven method of connecting employees to colleagues and content. No matter where they are, Grokker supports your entire workforce so they can maintain physical fitness, eat better, sleep more soundly, address their emotional health and calm financial stress.

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