

7 Ways to a Safer Workplace, Including COVID-19 Vaccination Mandates



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Gene Marks:

Hey, everybody. This is Gene Marks, and welcome to another episode of On the Mark. Now, before we get into our topic today, let me please remind you, if you have got any suggestions, any guests you'd like us to speak to, any topics that you think are important for running your business, please submit them to us. Go to payx.me/thrivetopics. I'd like to consider each and everyone. If it's something that's important to you and important to help you run your business, then please submit them there.

Again, it's payx, P-A-Y-X.me/thrivetopics. Send me your ideas. We will consider them, seriously. Okay. The topic for today's On the Mark is about making your workplace safe. This is what I am recommending to my clients. There are seven steps that we need to be taking as we are heading into 2022, as we are dealing with this Omicron variant and continuing COVID concerns to make our workplaces safe, seven steps.

The first step has to do with vaccinations. Now, some people that are running businesses are located in areas like where I am, in Philadelphia, where vaccinations are required. In New York City, vaccinations are required for employees working for private businesses. In Philadelphia, you cannot serve indoor diners if you're a restaurant owner in January unless those diners are vaccinated. Now, certainly that's not the case in all parts in the country, so depending on where you live, there's different rules.

The big rule that's coming down is President Biden's vaccination mandates that he issued back in November. These mandates affect any businesses with more than a hundred employees, and the mandate is as follows: If you've got more than a hundred employees, you are required to either make sure your employees are vaccinated or arrange for them to get weekly testing. Now, this mandate had some trouble in the courts. It was stopped and stayed for a while, but then that stay was overturned recently, which basically means it's still in effect, and OSHA is going to be moving forward with enforcing these rules.

Now, the rules are now, this whole case is going to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court did agree to hear it in early January, which means we should be seeing a decision by the end of January. If you are running a business with more than a hundred employees, you want to still make sure that you have taken the right steps to be sure that you are in compliance with the vaccination mandates because if the

Supreme Court rules in favor of the president's vaccination mandates, you're going to need to be ready to go.

Right now you should be following up with your employees, finding out who's vaccinated, getting their documentation, and if people either are not vaccinated or they don't want to share that information, you need to be considering making steps in advance for how you're going to get them tested and how you're going to be dealing with those employees. All of that thought process should be going on in advance because, again, if the Supreme Court upholds the president's mandates, you're going to need to be compliant with what those mandates are.

So, the first thing to do to keep your workplace safe is to prepare for President Biden's vaccine mandates regardless of what the Supreme Court is going to decide, that's number one.

Number two: have a mask policy. Now, some areas require mask when people come into your place of business. Some areas do not. You need to decide what your mask policy is. Let me give you some advice. Most of my clients are requiring their employees to wear masks, particularly if they are a customer facing business where customers are coming into their place of business.

If they are not a customer facing business, they're a B2B business, or a manufacturer, or a distributor, those clients, most of them are saying, "Okay, you only wear a mask if you're walking around to the lunchroom or to the bathroom. You don't have to wear a mask at your seat."

Now, listen, I know want to get into an argument as to whether or not these are effective or not, or whether it's theater or not, it doesn't make a difference. There's a perception at the very least, and there is some scientific evidence that says that masks are effective in containing this airborne virus.

So, at least for now, at least as we're heading into the first half of 2022, I'm only telling you what most of my clients are doing. They do have a mask policy and they're making their employees wear a mask. I'm not saying they're requiring their customers to do it, but they're certainly making their employees do it as well.

So, number one, take steps to make sure you're in compliance with the president's vaccination mandate. Number two, have a mask policy.

Number three: you can start going backwards on some of the less-important steps to safeguard your business. What I mean is, there was once a time where taking temperatures of customers or employees coming to your place of business was a thing. Now, for the most part, people recognized that, particularly with Omicron, a lot of people are walking around, they're asymptomatic, or they're not showing a high temperature. Taking temperatures is really not as important or effective as it used to be.

Doing the over the top cleaning methods that we were doing back in 2020, cleaning every surface, every five minutes, that also has fallen in priority because most of the scientists agree, it's an airborne virus, Omicron as well as COVID. So, because of that, the chances of catching it from a surface are very, very, very small. Finally, even social distancing while within a business, I've seen a lot of businesses try it, and really, they have not gone very well.

So, the third step you can take to make your workplace safe is to allocate less resources and time to the things that aren't as important. Taking temperatures, over the top cleaning, social distancing. Sure, I mean, they might have some impact, but listen, we're small businesses here. We only have so much time and money to spend on workplace safety. Spend it on some of the other things that I'm mentioning. Don't focus so much on the less important things. Have a mask policy though, and make sure you're in compliance with the president's vaccination mandates.

Let's go to number four: training. Now, listen, whether or not you have a mask policy or not, or if you're requiring vaccinations for employees and particularly your customers, there's going to be conflicts. Not everybody is in agreement with all of these policies. You have to give your employees tools and support to be able to deal with those conflicts. My advice to you is to get conflict training this year for your employees. Have a professional teach your employees how to deal with an irate customer or even an irate employee or a partner who refuses to wear a mask or wants to still come in into your business even though they're not vaccinated. The airlines are doing this heavily and you can even see in the news, all the issues that the airlines are having. Conflict right now is big, tensions are high, and your employees need your support.

Go to the National Restaurant Association's Educational Foundation. They have resources and tools and training to help your employees with conflicts. You can also Google conflict training or go on LinkedIn and find a good HR person, or you talk to your Paychex representative and ask for a recommendation for a good HR consultant that can train your employees on conflict training. We're not experts in this, but we need help in dealing with it.

So, getting conflict training, avoiding some of the less important things for safety, having a mask policy, make sure you're in compliance with the president's vaccination mandates. Those are four ways to make your workplace safe in 2022. I've got three more things to talk about.

Number five: communication. If you're going through all the steps to make your workplace safe, tell people about it. You should have signs on your front door, you should have signs inside your business on what your policies are, what you're doing to ensure that you have a safe workplace. Put it on your website, put it on your social media sites as well.

My smartest clients are using this opportunity, kind of as a little bit of a PR and a marketing tactic to say, "Listen, we care about our customers. We care about employees. Come and do business with us. We do have a mask policy. We do have a vaccination policy. We do have these things in place to make sure our business is safe and you can feel safe coming into our place of business." If you're taking those steps, communicate those steps.

Number six: invest in technologies. Talk to your Paychex representative about HR tools that can help you with things like surveys, because surveying your employees constantly to make sure that they're happy, to make sure that they feel safe, to make sure how they feel about a mask policy or a vaccination policy, you need to make sure you're in constant communication with your employees. If you're very small and you can talk to them, great. If you can give them through a survey using technology to do that, they can do that anonymously and you might get more accurate and better answers.

Self-service tools. If you are in a business where people are coming in to buy something, to give them the opportunity to do all their interactions with the kiosk instead of a human being, not only cuts your overhead, but also creates a more safer environment. And finally, if you're in the business of shipping products, delivery and logistics apps are hot this year, so make sure that you're investing in them.

Finally, if you have a customer relationship application, or if you have a good HR application, leverage the automation and workflow and artificial intelligence capabilities of them. The more automation you have, the less people you might need in your office to get that automation done, and therefore the safer your office will be.

Finally, is culture. You're the owner, you're the manager, you are running the business. So, what you do is being watched closely by your employees. If you have a mask policy, wear a mask. If you have a vaccination policy, get vaccinated. Put on the face. I don't care whether you agree with all this stuff or not.

I don't care what you feel about what's going on with the CDC or in what ... It makes no difference. Okay? If you've got the policy and that's what you're doing, you want to make sure that your culture is abiding by that and that culture is going to come from you. You're in for a penny, you're in for a pound, and show it.

Finally, when it comes to culture, just remember that all of this creates a lot of stress for a lot of your employees, even your younger employees as well. This is like a really big deal for people, particularly that are younger in the workforce. So, you want to make sure that you have got good mental health benefits for them. Are you providing counseling? Are you providing therapy services? Does your health insurance reimburse for things like that? And is your workplace culture one where you're giving ample time off, or you have fun, safe events for your employees, maybe outdoors to keep them loose and keep them balanced as well? These are tough times and they're stressful times for a lot of your employees, and you need to be considering that.

So, how to make your workplace safe in 2022, 7 steps, make sure you're in compliance with the president's vaccination mandates because they could be happening unless the Supreme Court overturns them. Have a mask policy to keep your employees and your customers safe, or at least another perception of safety. Spend less time on the less important things because we've learned a lot, temperature checks, over-the-top cleaning methodology, social distancing inside of an office. Those things have been found to be less effective over time. Not that they're completely ineffective, but you can spend less time on those less important things.

Number four: get your employees trained. People need conflict training. Go to the National Restaurant Association's Educational Foundation and get their free resources because it applies to all businesses. It's not just for restaurants. In addition to that, hire an HR consultant talk to your Paychex rep. Get your employees trained on how to deal with conflicts because they need that training. Have better communication with both your employees and your customers.

If you're taking all these steps to make your workplace safe, communicate it: signs, on your website, on your social media.

Number six: invest in technologies, survey your employees with survey apps, self-service technologies like kiosk. If you're in the business of delivering, have delivery and logistics apps. Invest in automation, workflows and artificial intelligence to get more things done by technology, which means less people are needed in the office.

And number seven, and finally, have a safe culture. The tone comes from the top. That's you. All the safety stuff that you are doing right now, you got to live it and act on it because your employees are watching you. Speaking of your employees, have the kind of culture that promotes good mental health. Make sure you've got good mental health benefits. Make sure that you're offering enough time off or flexibility, maybe activities, outdoors, or safe activities that your employees can blow off a little steam. Very, very important. These are very, very stressful times.

All right, guys, I hope that helps. That's what I'm seeing my client doing in 2022 to keep a safe workplace. This is what I'm telling my clients to do. If you've got any questions or things about that, please contact me separately. You can email gene@marksgroup.net, or find me on Twitter @genemarks.

In the meantime, like I said earlier, if you've got any suggestions for topics that you'd like to see on this show, or any guests that you'd like to recommend, go to us at payx.me/thrivetopics. That's P-A-Y-X.me/thrivetopics. My name is Gene Marks. Thanks so much for listening. I hope this advice helps. We will see you next time with another episode of On the Mark. Take care.



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