

Navigating Leave

Returning to Work After Life's Big Moments



Leave is a normal part of the employee life cycle, though it is one of the more daunting transitions to navigate in the workplace. As little as **27% of the workforce** has access to paid family leave.¹ The first barrier is to implement policies that align with employee needs.

Planning Ahead

Planning for extended leave begins with **clarity and communication**. A well-crafted leave codebook can help teams navigate transitions smoothly. We need better communication strategies to bridge the **communication gap** between what policy makers and employees understand when it comes to leave.²



During the Leave

Small gestures, like a quick message or shared update, can help **maintain connection without pressure**. Meanwhile, the absence of a team member can be a **growth opportunity**. Assigning temporary responsibilities or encouraging cross-functional collaboration helps others build new skills.

Delegating leadership tasks can surface promotion-ready individuals. This allows emerging leaders to step into stretch roles, revealing who is ready for more responsibility. It also **builds confidence and resilience** across the team. Stepping into a manager's shoes, even temporarily, helps employees **develop critical skills**.³



Returning Smoothly

The return from leave should be met with **warmth and intention**. A simple welcome-back gesture or team acknowledgment can go a long way in making the employee feel valued. Reintegration conversations are crucial—**discuss what's changed, what remains the same, and what support is needed moving forward**. By co-creating a reentry plan that addresses anxieties and sets clear expectations, organizations can ensure a smoother transition and a more resilient team.



Leave is a shared journey - individuals, teams, and organizations all play a role. Thoughtful planning and genuine care transform leave into an opportunity for growth, resilience, and belonging.

References

1. [2024 Absence Plan Design and Practices Benchmarking Report | DMEC](#)

2. [2025 US Leave Management and HR Trend Report | NFP](#)

3. [Leave Management: The Ultimate Guide | Forbes Advisor](#)