

7 PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO WORK

STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYERS IN SINGAPORE



Work is an important role for many of us. When one suffers an injury or a medical condition and is unable to return to work (RTW), this may affect one's health and financial situation. At the same time, workforce manpower and productivity may be compromised at the workplace.

Employers have a big part to play in helping injured / ill workers RTW. Successful RTW makes good business sense as it reduces time and cost of training replacement workers and retains experienced workers. This guide is based on the "Seven principles of Successful Return to Work" developed by the Institute for Work & Health (IWH)(2007, rev 2014). These principles have been found to have positive impact on duration and costs of work disability.

Principle 1: Make early contact with the worker

If possible, contact the worker within the first 2 weeks of the injury or illness. This contact made with goodwill and concern helps the worker to feel connected to his/her workplace.

Principle 2: Arrange someone to coordinate RTW

The worker may feel lost after his/her injury or illness. It is useful to assign someone in the company to follow up and assist him/her during the RTW process.

Principle 3: With the worker's consent, communicate with healthcare professionals about workplace demands

This helps the healthcare professionals to better estimate when the worker is fit to RTW. Ask for a referral to an Occupational Therapist if you need assistance to address RTW issues.

Principle 4: Offer modified work (or work accommodation) to facilitate early RTW

Early RTW with appropriate work accommodations keeps the worker engaged in his/her role and facilitates his/her rehabilitation. Work accommodations can be as simple as rearranging the workstation or adjusting the work hours.

Principle 5: Ensure the worker's RTW plan do not disadvantage co-workers

Involve and seek support from co-workers in the planning and implementation of the RTW process of the worker to gain cooperation.

Principle 6: Train supervisors in work disability prevention and RTW planning

Learning about work injury management, ergonomics, and work accommodations helps supervisors to problem solve RTW issues.

Principle 7: Encourage a strong commitment to health and safety in the workplace

Research shows that investment of company resources, RTW policies/ disability management interventions and commitment to RTW are associated with good RTW outcomes.

