

Best Practices for a Modern Workplace

BY CHRIS BUCCINI

ON MONDAY, June 15, all 110 women and men of The Buccini/Pollin Group returned to our Downtown Wilmington office, after nearly 90 days of working from home. Like many other businesses in our region, we walked out of the doors with our laptops in hand on a March afternoon expecting to shortly return. And like so many other leading businesses in Northern Delaware and Southeastern Pennsylvania, we were able to run our businesses from home, having already moved towards a paperless office with such technology as Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

But as one of the largest office landlords in the region, with over six million square feet of office space occupied by 600 of the most prominent businesses and their 10,000 employees, and as a company built on the backs of entrepreneurs, we quickly started focusing on the task of responsibly bringing our BPG associates back to the office, as well as the welfare of the employees of our office tenants. And with so many of our associates on the “front lines” of our business at the properties, it didn’t seem equitable to have certain employees at home while others at work. So we created a task force comprised of professionals from our Facilities, HVAC, Asset Management, Human Resources, IT, Design, Security, and Senior Management teams to gather all best practices from around the globe as well as federal and state guidance, to guide our tenants as they bring their employees safely back into the office.

Studying best in class ideas being implemented in Asia, and being proposed in the United States, we began the multi-faceted work of creating back-to-work plans for all our buildings. The BPG “Back at Work” task force was created to bring together these protocols. Dealing with the issues of how to create a touchless experience from the parking lot, into the office lobby, up the elevator and into and around the office suite throughout the day proved more difficult than expected. Our design team was tasked with designing and installing [3,000] signs and [300] bottles of hand sanitizer; facilities/property management/HR had to critically think about how best to handle office worker’s usage of the office pantry, the use of meeting space, the appropriate physical protection between work stations, the pedestrian circulation throughout the space; IT led research on the usage of technologies, including the text every employee receives in the morning

checking in on their health; our president was personally responsible for figuring out the protocols and most efficient means of testing employees; and most recently HR partnered with a local nonprofit to create learning Pods for associates to have their children attend virtual school from a location near their workplace.

So after nearly three months of having our entire office back to work, in addition to our 1,000 employees at our office, residential, hotel, and sports and entertainment properties, we have had the opportunity to stress test our protocols and have been fortunate to not have a single case of COVID-



19 contracted from being in the office. With over 700 daily construction workers in the field, who never stopped working throughout the pandemic, we have had minimal issues, all of which were quickly contained. We have worked tirelessly to keep our 76ers Fieldhouse open, providing a safe place for over 1,000 young people to play sports every day; the Queen theater, one of the only live music venues in America to be re-opened, offering live music in a safe environment Wednesday through Saturday every week; restaurants such as De.Co food hall, Makers Alley, Constitution Yards Beer Garden, Bardea and IM Coffee, offering food, drinks and mental breaks; and seven hotels. The opening of Le Cavalier at the Green Room was one of a small handful of new restaurants to be opened throughout the entire

pandemic. And most important is the over [1,000] jobs that were saved.

As Labor Day, came and went, we find ourselves to be one of the only businesses back to work in Downtown Wilmington, or the surrounding New Castle County suburbs. Like J.P. Morgan, who recently announced that all senior sales and traders will be back by the end of September, we experienced firsthand the importance of being back in the office. While most companies would agree that they can keep their businesses functioning from the living rooms of their employees, those that I speak with share the difficulty of growing a business, and the very real challenges of fostering a corporate culture that attracts and retains employees. Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan, was reported to say that “the WFH lifestyle seems to have impacted younger employees, and overall productivity and ‘creative combustion’ has taken a hit”. This is why Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos wrote in a note to employees that “much of the essential work we do cannot be done from home,” as they purchased 900,000 sq.ft. of office space in six cities in the United States last month.

At BPG’s Downtown Wilmington headquarters, we have been very focused on safety, COVID education, communication, and more safety. We pride ourselves in having always led from the front and serving as a resource to help all of our office tenants think about how best to bring their employees back to work. I have urged tenants to start bringing back

employees to the office – why not bring back 20, 30 or 40 percent of your workforce? There are not significant elevator issues or social distance limitations when so few are in the office. And at some point, you have to start implementing a back to work strategy.

Being back in the office certainly isn’t easy. We are vigilant about wearing masks, respecting social distancing, and the many protocols that are in place. But our state needs us to get back to work in a safe and reasonable way. We need to keep our local economy going. The pandemic has had a devastating effect on small businesses. Our staying home is destroying the sandwich shop, the dry cleaner, and the shoemaker. So put your mask on, continue to wash your hands, socially distance, and join BPG in getting back to work. Our city, our state, and our small businesses need you. We miss seeing you! ■



Chris Buccini is co-president of The Buccini/Pollin Group, Inc. (“BPG”), and founder and president of BPG Real Estate Services, LLC, the entity responsible for BPG’s office, residential, retail, and parking management and leasing efforts.

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