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# Preparing the workplace

**Identification and management of  
integration issues in a return to work of an  
injured employee**

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**Psychologist**

# Focus of presentation

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- Return to work of a worker who has been away for an extended period of time

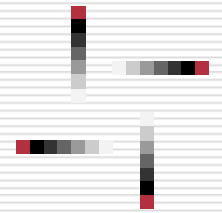
OR

- Where there are more complex factors involved
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# Change management

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- ❑ Implementing an effective RTW process is a change management process
  - ❑ Do not underestimate the impact of change
  - ❑ Do not deal with it purely in a technical manner – “dotting i’s and crossing t’s” misses the emotional elements of this matter
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**It is  
emotional!**

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# People don't like...

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- ❑ Surprises .... (apart from winning cross lotto)
  - ❑ Changes imposed on them
  - ❑ Having to do things differently –  
“don't disturb my comfort zone”
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# Efficiency doesn't cut it

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- ❑ This is not just about being efficient
  - ❑ This is about managing people's feelings and their fears
  - ❑ This is about disrupting comfort zones
  - ❑ Problem solving
  - ❑ Risk management
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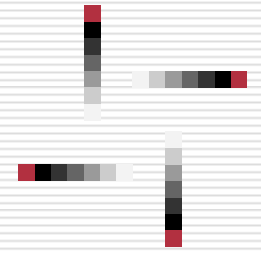
# Do a gap analysis

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- Where you are now versus where you want to (realistically) be
  
  - **Objectives are more specific than simply a RTW**
    - Success factors and milestones should be identified and communicated as relevant and within parameters of confidentiality. These objectives should change over time to reflect progress. How will stakeholders know if it is (is not) working?
  
    - Some parties will get the whole picture, others will get part of it. Those who only get a part must be able to make sense of, and perceive personal relevance to their part of the picture.
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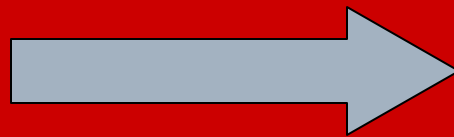
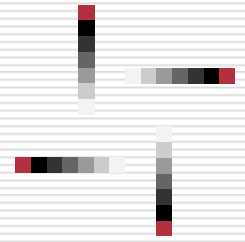
# Consider possible problems

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**Just as in a change process, consider potential problems that might arise in the journey from where you are now to where you want to be.**

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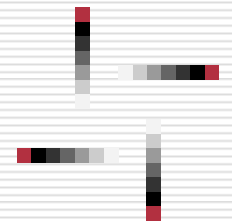
**Do a basic risk  
analysis.**



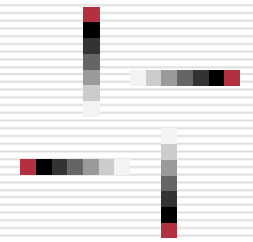
# Know what you are dealing with

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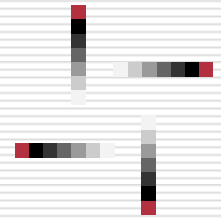
- Be clear about the parameters
    - Was the worker liked before the injury?
    - Has there been any “bad blood” since the initial injury? What happened? Who was involved? Is it over now?
    - Is the worker’s attitude towards return positive?
    - Are the colleagues positive about the return?
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- Will anyone be displaced or disadvantaged by the return? Will this cause a ripple effect?
  - Will the return necessitate changes for others (e.g., duties, hours, status, seating, etc.)?
  - Will the return be on limited hours? For how long are the graduated hours anticipated?
  - Are there adequate meaningful duties available to meet capacity?
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- Are there other agendas happening concurrently (e.g., industrial, interpersonal, etc.)?
  - Are there adequate resources to support the return?
  - Does the line manager have the skills, willingness and capacity to manage the return?
  - ??????????????
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# Identify main stakeholders

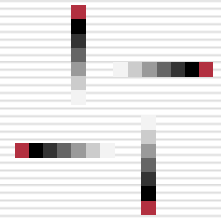
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- Identify stakeholders internal and external to the workplace
  - External stakeholders are primarily associated with the returning worker, but not always
  - Those stakeholders associated with the returning worker who are most influential are generally the partner and the treating practitioner/s
  - The direct line supervisor and work colleagues within the team or section should always be considered internal stakeholders
  - Identify the drivers for each stakeholder
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# Influencers vs stakeholders

- ❑ There are some people internal to the workplace who exert significant influence even if they are not stakeholders in the process. (They may hold a dual role.)
- ❑ Identify the opinion leaders in the workplace
- ❑ Identify those internal people who exert significant influence specifically over the returning worker
- ❑ Are the opinion leaders and “influencers” in the workplace on side? What messages are they communicating and how are they doing so?





# Drivers & barriers: worker & others

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## Wants

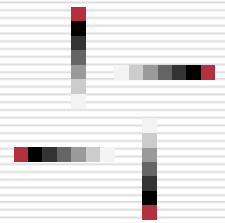
- Goals which are consistent with the RTW process
- Goals which are about gains or seeking redress from the process

## Fears

- Major fears
- Minor concerns

## Realistic or unrealistic

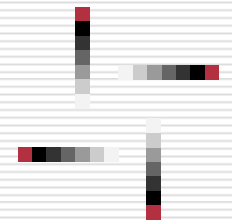
- Initiated and/or driven by the returning worker
  - Initiated and/or driven by others
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# Psychological factors

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- **More complex scenarios**
  - Understand “wants” and “fears” from a framework that identifies how the returning worker thinks his/her life has been affected by the injury and/or will be affected by the return to work.
  - **Some useful frameworks to consider**
    - Trust - distrust
    - Psychological contracts
    - Threat, loss and protection
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# Trust - distrust

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- Trust: positive expectations about another person's behaviour
    - ➔ willing to risk, or have a go
  
  - Distrust: negative expectations about another person's behaviour
    - ➔ not willing to risk, or have a go
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# Trust - distrust

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□ Trust is based on:

- Knowledge
- Transaction – costs and benefits
- Values – belonging, identification

■ What behaviours would you see?



# Psychological contract

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- “Psychological contract comprises subjective beliefs regarding an exchange agreement between an individual and ... the employing firm and its agents.”
- Powerful mental model / mindset
- individuals believe “that an agreement is mutual, that is, a common understanding exists that binds the parties involved to a particular course of action”

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**(Rousseau, 2001)**

# Threat, loss and protection

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## Loss

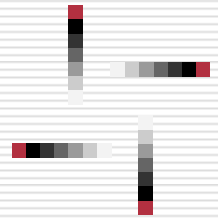
- Believes the injury has caused and/or the return to work will cause something to be lost irretrievably

## Threat

- Believes the return to work has the potential to harm him/her in some area of his/her life

## Protection

- The worker is striving to protect something that is important to him/her



# Threat, loss and protection

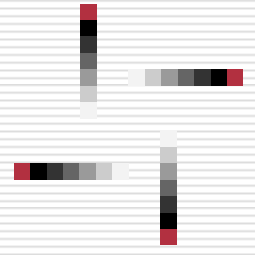
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- What things does the returning worker value highly?
    - Associated with work
    - Associated with ???
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# Consider skills & knowledge

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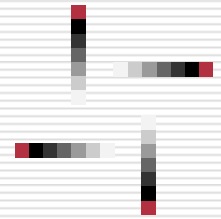
- Identify and address skill deficiencies
    - Coping skills
    - Communication skills
    - Interpersonal skills
    - Leadership and management skills
  
  - Identify and address knowledge gaps
    - Workers compensation
    - Confidentiality
    - Injury and associated factors
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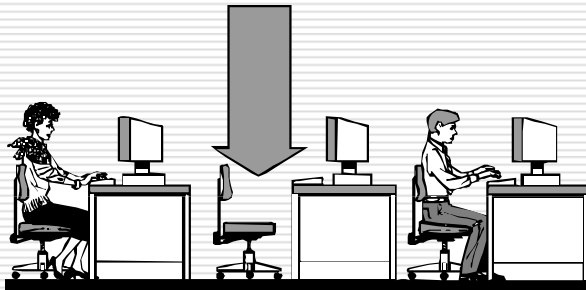
**So then ... what  
now???**

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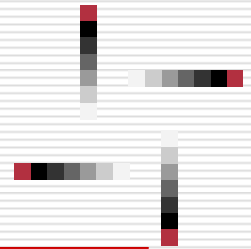


# The welcome

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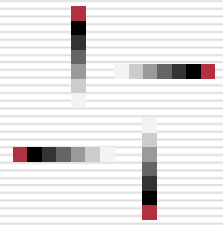
- The direct line supervisor should meet the worker and help with the immediate “settling in”.
  
  - Induction process
  
  - Has someone been nominated to be the “back-up” contact if the direct line supervisor is unavailable during any part of the “settling in” period?
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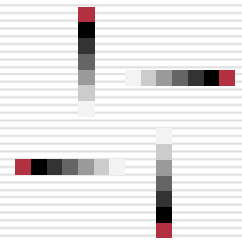
# Communication

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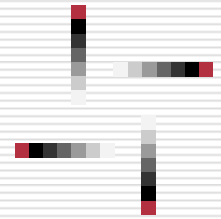
- Identify and communicate the key objectives of the RTW process to all relevant parties
    - Seek discussion with the returning worker about what can be communicated to parties in the workplace
    - Engage the treating practitioner/s in this process
  
  - Communicate, communicate, communicate
    - Build certainty where possible
    - If you don't know, tell them. Fill vacuums with sense, before others fill it with fears or fantasy
    - Thank all in the workplace on a regular basis for their efforts
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- Look for early indications of success
    - Communicate about the success and build on it
    - Don't let successes be taken for granted, no matter how small
  
  - Speak to key parties on an individual basis
    - Engage on a personal level, as ***it is personal for them***
  
  - Do what you can to foster communication with or between key stakeholders outside of the workplace
    - Lack of / poor communication with the worker from any of these external stakeholders is a problem
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- Facilitate and normalise channels of communication that you wish to endure
    - Foster direct communication between the worker and the supervisor
    - Provide a back-up or alternative if the worker/important others cannot speak to the supervisor. This is important when the supervisor lacks ready availability and/or the supervisor is seen as part of the problem.
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# Communicate status

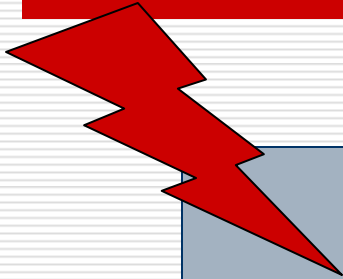
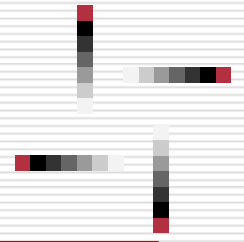
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- ❑ People like to feel *important* and *valued*
  
- ❑ The provision of resources and being organised with regard to a return to work process communicates a clear message to the returning worker as to how important s/he is to you and to the organisation.

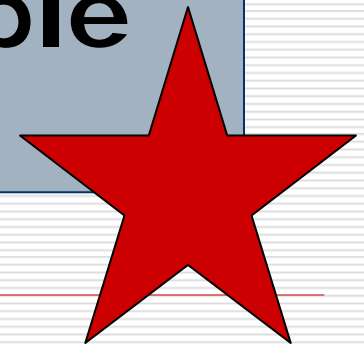
Minimise delays and interruptions that are within your control.

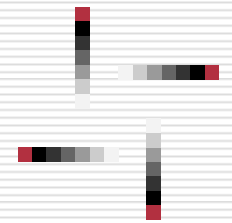
- ❑ You can control these things.
  - ***Do not get them wrong!***





**Follow through.**  
**Do what you say you will**  
**do.**  
**Be consistent, reliable**  
**and “up-front”.**





# Support the supervisor

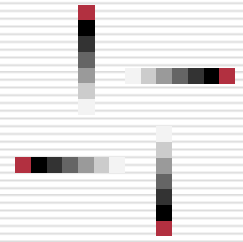
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- The worker receives support in a RTW scenario but there is no automatic allocation of a support person/coach to the supervisor
    - A separate “coach” for the supervisor brings benefits to all
    - This is especially so when there are other factors in the workplace that the supervisor is expected to manage for the RTW to be successful
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# Support the other workers

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- ❑ Remind personnel about the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or organise for limited counselling.
  - ❑ Don't let people struggle unnecessarily.
  - ❑ Seek permission to liaise with the counsellor for ideas about workplace interventions
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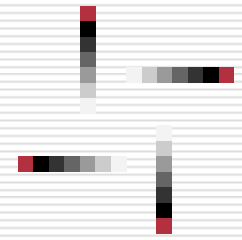


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**Don't wait – do it now!**

**Do it as soon as you  
recognise there is a  
need.**

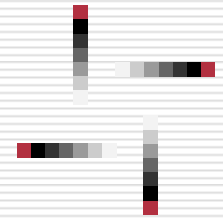
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# Say sorry & mean it

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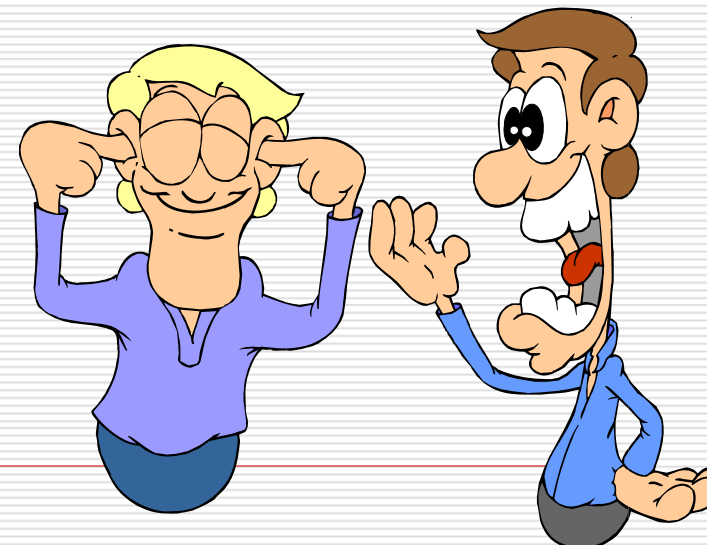
- ❑ If there has been an error, or if things have just not been done well, say sorry.
  - ❑ Make it meaningful.
  - ❑ Research suggests effective apologies include:
    - Take full responsibility
    - Explain why the problem occurred
    - How it will be fixed or avoided in the future
    - Offer recompense, if appropriate
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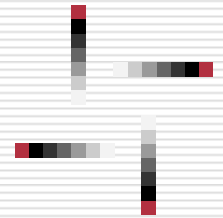


# Demonstrate leadership

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- Model appropriate behaviour – walk the talk, be positive
- Stamp out gossip.
- Put an end to inappropriate behaviour. Don't let little things get out of hand.
- **Make the hard decisions**
- Seek your own support independent of the work group.
- **Be there!**  
(Especially if the situation is tricky.)



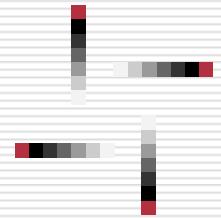


# Watch for problems

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- Watch for signs of resistance or problems
  - Withdraw
  - Disengage with the process
  - Sabotage



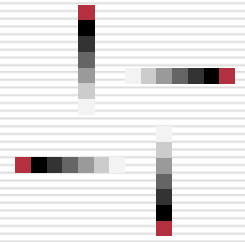


# Repeat the process

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- ❑ A return to work is not a static process. It is dynamic and changes over time.
- ❑ Even when there is apparent success, this process of reviewing stakeholders and their drivers and influencers and their messages should be repeated at least once. In more complex return to work processes this should be a regularly repeated process.





# Key take home messages

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- ❑ If it seems too easy to be true, it probably is!
  - ❑ Prepare to plan, or plan to fail.
  - ❑ Be positive and communicate a positive approach and expectation.
  - ❑ Seek help in the process. You do not have to have all the answers.
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