

From the Buffalo Business First:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/buffalo/news/2021/01/05/legal-tips-for-getting-more-people-in-workplace.html>

## Top of mind as 2021 begins: Getting more people back in the workplace

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As an industrial engineer, [Christine Vargas](#) is always thinking about efficiencies in the workplace.

Vargas Associates, her Rochester-based facilities project management firm, began to increase its presence in Western New York in 2015 and added a Buffalo office in 2017.

“A big part of what we do is interior design and space planning, but the project management element is about helping clients navigate the process of improving their space, renovating and relocating,” she said.

That means helping clients find ways to do what they do more efficiently, while looking for areas to trim costs or better utilize assets. A focus during the Covid-19 pandemic has been finding cost-effective ways for employers to protect the physical and mental health of their staffs.

Despite steady increases in Covid-19 cases in recent months, some businesses are looking for ways to safely reopen or bring more people into the workplace on a regular basis. Directions by sector, but Vargas said the crux of it spans industries. The company created checklists so businesses could go through each room to see how to comply with guidelines.

“We go through different things that can be done,” she said. “It could be anything from removing furniture, spacing things out, marking floors (with details on where to walk or stand), posting



VARGAS ASSOCIATES

Christine Vargas, founder of Vargas Associates

communications or updating schedules so workplace capacity changes.”

Another element is a space assessment. The company identifies where congestion of workers could happen and provides suggestions on how space can be reworked.

Major changes can be costly and, Vargas said, not all businesses have room in their budgets to make them. Instead, she helps them look at easier, less expensive ways to make reopening work on a limited budget by taking office furniture out of rooms and utilizing signage when possible.

One of the keys for employers should be reassuring employees that the environment is safe, said Harvey Sanders, a labor and employment law attorney at Sanders & Sanders in Cheektowaga.

“People want to know that they’re not going to be working on top of each other, that there’s distancing, cleaning protocols and security protocols,” he said. “A lot of employers have been doing the work-from-home situation for an extended period of time, and they are realizing that there’s a benefit to having employees at work.

A best practice Sanders mentioned is for businesses to document what they are doing when it comes to safety protocols.

“That way if there is some kind of audit, you have got your protocols in place,” he said.

**Patrick Connelly**

Reporter

*Buffalo Business First*

