



The following is also relevant with a slightly stressed employee.

After a stress leave, an employee often returns to work with one of two attitudes:



1. "Now I just need to get started again" – "Everything is as before, because now I am well".
2. Afraid to "fail again".

The brain has been "broken" and needs "rehabilitation", just as we would have expected after a broken leg. It is therefore important to let the employee start again slowly and with defined tasks. If not, you may end up with another sick leave, which is costly – both for the employee and for the company.

Good advice for the people manager:

Your employee is definitely eager to return fast and prove him- or herself. Often, the employee feels that he/she owes the company to perform. As the leader, you therefore need to make sure that the return happens at a steady pace and properly. Therefore:

- Agree with your employee how to inform colleagues and business partners. For instance, you or your employee could write an email that you both approve. Your employee may not have the strength to answer many well-meaning questions – which is quite alright. Communication and the matching of expectations is vital to everybody.
- Make sure to prioritise and plan job routines in the start-up phase, and to clarify who should take over the remaining routines. Make sure to communicate this information to everyone.
- Make firm agreements on working hours: which days, time and number of hours.
- A good rule of thumb: Do not increase the number of hours and complexity too fast. In the beginning, it is necessary to let the employee handle simple, limited tasks that do not involve too many people and that have no major consequences if the time limit is exceeded. The same rules apply to a colleague who is on part-time stress leave.
- Prepare a time schedule describing how the employee can gradually return to normal hours. It is vital that

time, number of tasks **and** complexity are not adjusted at the same time.

- Set up a short weekly meeting with the employee to make sure that everything goes in the right direction. The meetings should be used to prioritise tasks etc. and to create an overview. Your employee may want more hours, a faster rate and more complexity. As the leader, YOU must divide the working routines in a sensible way. It is important to everyone that you control the progress in working hours and tasks.
- Tell your employee that it is important that he/she tells you if things go too fast. It must be okay to "put one's foot down", or you will risk a new stress leave. It is very individual what works and what does not.
- Show that it is "legitimate" and accepted among **every-one** to take a break, as we all need it. A fit brain is much better at its job. Take a visible break yourself.

Avoid:

- Letting your employee start at full time from day one.
- Setting free/loose boundaries for the employee: "See how much you can do".
- Not informing colleagues and business partners that the employee is back, and what is expected from the employee (remember to use clear and direct communication!).