

Combating Absenteeism

Recently, I was asked by a manager how he should deal with the fact that on any given day 10% of his employees are absent from work. I informed the manager that the problem of employee absenteeism is a problem best resolved by taking the following four positive interventions versus taking a negative or punitive approach.

Change Management Style: We are all aware of the fact that when employees call in ill, it does not mean they are truly too physically ill to work. One reason, outside of illness, that employees are absent is stress, and the number one reason employees are stressed has to do with their relationship with their manager/supervisor. Management styles that are too authoritarian tend to promote high levels of absenteeism among employees. Authoritarian managers are managers who have poor listening skills, set unreachable goals, have poor communication skills, and are inflexible. In other words, they yell too much, blame others for problems, and make others feel that it must be their way or the "highway." Authoritarian managers tend to produce high absenteeism rates. By identifying managers who use an authoritarian style, and providing them with management training, you will be taking a positive step not only toward reducing absenteeism, but also reducing turnover, job burnout, and employee health problems such as backaches and headaches.

Change Working Conditions: The employees in your company probably work in a well-lighted climate controlled building. The working conditions I am referring to relate to coworker relationships. Not only does relationship stress occur between the employee and manager, but it also exists between employees. Frequently I hear employees say they did not go to work because they are fearful of or angry with another employee. These employees usually report they just could not deal with "so and so" today, so they called in ill. Companies that adopted policies and values that promote employee respect and professionalism, and promote an internal conflict resolution procedure, are companies that reduce employee stress. A reduction in employee stress reduces employee absenteeism.

Provide Incentives: Giving employees incentives for reduced absenteeism is not the same as rewarding or giving employees bonuses for reduced absenteeism. An incentive provides an employee with a boost to their motivation to avoid unnecessary absenteeism. It simply helps the employee decide to go to work versus staying home and watching Jerry Springer. The types of incentive programs used by companies are numerous. Some companies allow employees to cash-in unused sick days at the end of every quarter, others give an employee two hours of bonus pay for every month of perfect attendance; and still others provide employees with a buffet lunch, a certificate of achievement, or even a scratch-off card concealing prizes. The type of incentive program that your company uses should be one created especially for your company. You can create an incentive program tailored to your unique company by allowing employees to help you develop the incentive program. For example, your employees may not care about receiving a \$25.00 U.S. saving bond for perfect attendance, but they might respond very well to being able to leave one hour early on Friday if they have perfect attendance all week. The duration of the incentive program is also very important. Once again allow your employees to help guide you to determine the length of time between incentives. Some companies find that they can simply reward employees with perfect attendance once a year, while others decide once a month is best, and still others decide once a week works best. The general rule of thumb is to reward workers more frequently the younger they are and the more difficult the work is to perform. Also, it is best to start with small incentives and work up to larger ones if necessary.

Develop an Attendance Policy: Every company should have an attendance policy. An attendance policy allows a manager to intervene with an employee who is frequently absent. Besides stress as a primary reason for employee absenteeism, other causes relate to alcoholism, domestic violence, and family problems. If you confront an employee about his or her frequent absenteeism, and they inform you it is due to personal problems, consider referring the employee to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). If the employee's absenteeism relates to a medical problem or a family member with a medical problem, you may have to consider allowing the employee to use the benefits allowed to them under the American's with Disability Act (ADA) or the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Early identification of these employees will get them back to work as fast as possible. Lastly, make sure that you have an attorney review your attendance policy to make sure it does not violate any State or Federal labor laws.

By incorporating the above four strategies into your company you will not only reduce absenteeism you will reduce employee burnout, turnover, poor morale, and workplace negativism.

<http://www.employer-employee.com/absent.html>