

Effectively Reduce Absenteeism as a Retention Strategy



Employers seeking new ways to retain employees in these tough recruiting times may want to review their absenteeism policies. Absenteeism may be the first sign of pending turnover, both voluntary and involuntary. The cause of absenteeism may be more than an employee who can't follow the rules.

How can an employer keep attendance at acceptable levels but not terminate employees unnecessarily for absenteeism?

Counseling Versus Discipline

Each time an employee is tardy or absent, the supervisor should meet briefly with the employee to discuss the incident. This meeting should take place immediately upon the employee's return to work. The supervisor should welcome back the employee, let the employee know about the documented absence, the problems it may have caused, and ask if there is anything the supervisor can do to help the employee assure this will not happen again. Often the quickest way to correct a problem is to pay attention to it.

Don't Hire the Chronically Absent Employee

Ask applicants to rate their attendance and then ask how many days they missed during the last year. When reference checking, verify this information with the employer. If an applicant has a history of poor attendance, chances are this will be an employee with poor attendance. Note that employers may not ask how many days an employee missed due to illness or consider FMLA absences when evaluating attendance.

Know Your Operating Attendance Needs

Every employer is different. Perhaps the employer can arrange for the employee to work flex hours and thereby improve attendance without disrupting company operations. Allow employees to take planned time off and discourage unplanned absences if this works for the employer's operation. A company should determine its attendance needs and structure a policy accordingly.



Communicate Company Expectations

Applicants should be told about the organization's attendance requirements and asked if they can meet these standards. When new employees start, a discussion about attendance standards should be part of the orientation. Supervisors should publicly praise employees who meet attendance requirements.

Use an EAP

Many times employees may be experiencing personal problems or illnesses, such as depression, which result in a decline in attendance. Employers are not equipped to counsel employees regarding how to resolve these issues, but an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is. An EAP can also train supervisors how to recognize some of the early symptoms of these problems and to direct employees to the EAP while the situation can be corrected.

Educate Employees

Some employees come with poor work habits. An employer that communicates its expectations regarding attendance and who delivers appropriate consequences when expectations are not met can help employees learn better habits. Sometimes a supervisor may need to have a positive but pointed discussion with an employee to clarify that excessive absenteeism is not acceptable.

Replacing an employee may cost an employer thousands of dollars. Using some of the above tactics may assist improving the employee's attendance and reducing the likelihood of termination


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Act on a Timely Basis

When supervisors let poor attendance go by without addressing it, employees assume that it is not a problem. Silence implies acceptance. Eventually, the supervisor becomes frustrated and strikes out at the employee. The employee is surprised because there was no indication earlier that the attendance was a problem. Sometimes communication and trust have broken down too far for either party to turn the situation around successfully. Addressing an attendance issue early in the process is much more likely to be corrected.

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