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## How to Correct an Attendance Problem

The guide covers

- › Step 1: Adopt Publish, and Distribute an Attendance Policy
- › Step 2: Implement the Policy and Maintain Accurate Records
- › Step 3: Look for Trends in Absences
- › Step 4: Confront the Employee Who Is Regularly Absent
- › Step 5: Consider Holding a Meeting With All Employees to Address Attendance Issues
- › Step 6: Create and Implement an Award Program for Employees with Good Attendance

Attendance problems can lower workplace morale and significantly disrupt employee productivity as all employers depend on employees arriving for their scheduled shifts. Failure to arrive to work may present an especially difficult problem if the employee with an attendance problem is an otherwise excellent employee. Nonetheless, employee attendance is an issue that must be dealt with and following the guidelines below will make the process much easier, and help to ensure that all employees are treated equally.

## Step 1: Adopt, Publish, and Distribute an Attendance Policy

Adopting an attendance policy helps to ensure that all employees understand the employer's view towards attendance. Supervisors especially need to know the employer's attendance expectations and the importance that is placed on arriving to work when scheduled as supervisors are responsible for implementing the policy.

The attendance policy should explain:

- › How important good attendance is to the employer;
- › How all employees will be affected when an employee chooses to miss a scheduled shift and how the overall productivity of the employer will suffer;
- › What constitutes good attendance and what employees should do if they know that they will have to miss work; and
- › The disciplinary measures that will be imposed for employees who violate the policy.

This policy should be signed by all employees upon beginning employment and it should be placed in the employee handbook. This policy should also be posted in visible locations in the workplace and on the employer's intranet portal. Employers should ensure that all employees understand the policy and should inform them of who to contact about attendance issues.

Some employers want to consider granting employees personal time so that employees do not feel the need to lie and call out sick if they need to miss a day of work for personal reasons. However, the employer and supervisors should be very careful that employees do not take advantage of this personal time.

Employers should lead by example and encourage management and supervisors to do the same. Employers and supervisors should try not to miss work and should be instructed that if they have to miss a day it is best to provide advance notice so that all may plan accordingly. This will set the tone for the workplace and employees will be less likely to freely violate attendance policies when management is making an effort to be show up to work every day.

## Step 2: Implement the Policy and Maintain Accurate Records

After deciding on the policy and publishing it to all employees, the next step is to begin implementation. There are a variety of software programs that can be used to make tracking attendance of employees easier. Supervisors should be trained on how to record attendance and should follow the same uniform system so that there is consistency and no questions about attendance records. If the employer is worried that employees will contest the records, employees should be required to sign a note or entry into a log that indicates that the employee did not show up for work on a particular day, or has exceeded, or looks close to exceeding, his or her vacation or personal days.

Employers should stress that employees must notify a supervisor as soon as they know that they are going to miss work, so that a replacement can be found. Employees should also realize that if they sign up for overtime shifts, and then fail to show up, this absence will also be treated more harshly by supervisors and management because the employee has volunteered for this extra time.

## Step 3: Look for Trends in Absences

Supervisors should scan the attendance records or logs on a regular basis and look for a repeated pattern of absences by a particular employee. Supervisors should be aware of the following:

- › An employee who regularly calls in sick when his or her department is at its busiest and does not ever provide enough advance warning so that adequate replacements can be found.
- › An employee who always uses sick days on a Friday or Monday and it appears as if the employee is regularly taking advantage of his or her self-created long weekend.
- › An employee who goes out often during the week, fails to show up for work on time the next day and then calls in sick later in the day.

- › An employee who has been a model employee, but over the past month has missed five days of work.

Supervisors should limit any conclusions to the written record. Listening to rumors about what is going on from other employees or failing to confront the employee directly may lead to confusion and lower workplace morale.

#### **Step 4: Confront the Employee Who Is Regularly Absent**

Once it becomes clear that the employee has an attendance problem, the supervisor should email the employee and ask to meet with him or her privately, or pull the employee aside and ask the employee why he or she is missing work.

There are legitimate reasons that may make the employee more prone to missing work and in those instances, the supervisor should work to accommodate the employee's needs.

Example: A close family member may have recently become ill, or the employee may have developed an illness. In that case, the employer or supervisor should work with the employee to determine if there is any way that the employee can manage to continue in his position without missing so much work.

Example: The employee shares only one car in the family and some days the employee cannot drive the car to work because another family member needs to use it. The employer or supervisor can then investigate carpooling options with other employees, or public transportation options.

The supervisor should also stress to the employee that:

- › The employee's absences have had a direct impact on the overall performance of the employer;
- › The employer is serious about attendance issues and that the employee should consider himself or herself forewarned;
- › The employer expects to see an immediate improvement in the employee's attendance;
- › If the employee continues to miss work, the employee will be subject to increasingly severe disciplinary sanctions, up to and including termination; and
- › That the employee's supervisor will be closely monitoring the employee to ensure that the employee's attendance improves.

This meeting, and a detailed record of what was said at the meeting, should be documented and placed in the employee's file.

If the employee again violates the attendance policy, the supervisor should schedule another meeting with the employee and should discuss:

- › Why the employee still has not complied with the policy;
- › How the employee's poor attendance is having a detrimental impact on the employer;
- › The appropriate disciplinary sanction depending on the employer's existing disciplinary policy. Generally, at this point it is appropriate to suspend the employee without pay.

Again, the supervisor should thoroughly document what was discussed at this meeting, what the employee said and the procedures implemented in case a lawsuit is ever filed.

Attendance issues should be addressed in an equal manner with all employees and the employer's disciplinary procedures should be applied in a consistent manner.

Further, if the individual who is habitually absent is a manager or supervisor, the employer may need to be more aggressive in imposing sanctions. Overlooking frequent and unexcused absences by a high level employee will set a bad example for all employees and the employer will lose legitimacy if it is necessary to discipline other employees for the same violation.

#### **Step 5: Consider Holding a Meeting With All Employees to Address Attendance Issues**

If the employer finds that multiple employees have attendance issues, it may be appropriate to hold a meeting with all employees and present the statistics on absenteeism. At this meeting, it should be stressed that attendance is a high priority for the employer and that good attendance is an absolute prerequisite of all employees. The employer should explain that if poor attendance continues, the employer will be forced to terminate individuals and hire more employees.

## Step 6: Create and Implement an Award Program for Employees with Good Attendance

Employers may want to consider creating an award program to reward employees with good attendance records. Creative ideas may include sending a congratulatory email to the employees with good attendance, taking employees with good attendance out to lunch once a month, or rewarding employees with good attendance with one extra paid day of vacation every quarter of the year. Recognizing employees with good attendance records serves as an incentive for employees to comply with the attendance policy.

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