



Three strategies for managing sickness absence

Most managers have to pick up the phone now and again to be told that one of the team is too ill to make it into the office today. The impact can be a short term nuisance while you rearrange workloads. Or it can turn into more than that and start to affect the service provided to customers, over-burden others in the team and, if you're paying for the absence, have a severe impact on your bottom line.

Here are some proven strategies that you can put into action to make sure that absence doesn't become a real problem for your business.

Clearly outline your expectations

First of all, it's essential that your staff have clear written guidelines about the process to follow if they aren't able to come to work because of sickness or injury.

Do you require them to call in by a certain time? Do they need to speak to you or is a text or email acceptable? Do they need to communicate with you personally or someone else in the team? Do they need to keep in contact with you each day they're off? Are you paying Statutory Sick Pay only or more?

Of course, your process won't be worth the paper it's written on if it's only applied sometimes. In the worst case scenario, if you have a bad apple of an employee who simply disappears for a few days at a time, you need to be able to impose sanctions such as stopping pay, you can only do this if there is a clearly communicated policy consistently applied.

Hold return-to-work discussions

After any period of sickness absence, whether it's two days or two months, hold a return-to-work discussion with the individual returning to work, as soon as possible. This is the one single measure that's been found to have the most effect on reducing absence.

This discussion should cover the reason for the absence, and if was more than 7 days, check whether the Fit for Work certificate from the GP recommends any adjustments. Check that your reporting in process was

followed and give reminders if it wasn't. Give the opportunity to say whether anything at work may have contributed to the ill health.

Make a file note of the conversation in case of later repercussions.

Make reasonable adjustments to ease people back into their roles

If anyone takes more than 2 weeks off for sickness in one block, it's normally due to a serious health problem and you'll need to be more proactive and flexible in supporting the person back to work.

For example, if the journey into work is limiting how quickly the person can return, consider organizing for some tasks to be carried out from home. This is a particularly good remedy if someone has broken a limb and is in a plaster cast - they will probably be bored stiff at home and immobile!

To ease long-term absentees back to their jobs, it's often helpful to agree a phased return-to-work of shorter working hours, gradually building back up over say 6 weeks as the individual completes their recuperation and re-acclimatizes.

Talk to the individual in question to establish a way forward that will genuinely help them.

We help businesses to manage sickness absence and advise on policy and on individual cases. Do you want to discuss your challenges with a professional, and walk away with a manageable action plan so you know exactly what you need to do? Give us a call today on 0784 475303 or email enquiries@thehr.co.uk.