

healthy *working*

A workplace wellness update

Tell me more about Presenteeism



Getting Employees Back In The Game

They show up for work everyday – sometimes working longer than everyone else – but they just do enough to get by. A challenge for any manager to resolve, *presenteeism* can cost employers more than absenteeism in terms of lost productivity. Unfortunately, it's also an increasing problem in today's workforce.

How can people leaders work with employees to make a change and get them functioning at their best in the here and now? The following steps will take you through the process of detecting and treating presenteeism so your employees can focus on working smarter instead of longer.

Presenteeism can take on several different forms. While the idea may conjure up the image of a stereotypical "slacker," employees suffering from presenteeism may in fact put in excessive work hours. Motivated by fear or the belief that their physical presence shows job commitment, their perspective actually has the reverse of the intended effect—making them less

productive than co-workers who keep a more balanced schedule.

Presenteeism also happens when employees are at work in body but not in mind or spirit. Placing their jobs above families and health, attendance-conscious workers don't miss a day—even when they should.

If employees are in an unsupportive work environment or being at work compromises their personal life or health, it's not surprising that they may emotionally detach themselves from the task at hand. These employees work long hours and maintain good attendance only to 'appear' productive even though the results suggest something very different.



Causes of Presenteeism

There are many causes for presenteeism but several of them are rooted outside of the workplace. Professionalism demands that people leave their personal life at home and many employees try to do this at all costs.

The reality though is that work-life conflict is related to stress, and employees juggling family and work demands are more at risk. When major issues such as divorce, illness or abuse take hold of an employee's personal life, it becomes increasingly difficult to leave problems—and stress—at the door.

But what if those problems begin at the door? An unsupportive work environment can also be a major cause of presenteeism. Issues such as; job insecurity, unrealistic expectations, pressure to excel, boredom, isolation, intimidation and harassment can all contribute.

These tips will help me support my staff



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Proactive Action

The earlier you act to resolve presenteeism, the earlier employees will be off the sidelines and back in the game. Here's what to do when presenteeism becomes a problem.

Listen. Talking to an employee about his or her presenteeism can be a challenge. Understanding your employee and getting to the heart of the matter, however, is well worth the effort. Remember that *listening* is more important than talking. Talk to the employee in question privately in a comfortable and quiet setting, always being respectful of their feelings and ideas—even if the feedback is hard to hear. Let them know your concerns and that your goal is to find a solution that works for everyone involved.

Respond. Don't hesitate to act if the situation requires immediate attention; for example, if you're worried presenteeism may cause a safety hazard. Also, connect with employees to suggest services they can access to match their specific needs.

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Set fair and reasonable goals. People are less productive when they don't know what's expected of them because they feel 'lost.' Workers may also believe they have no choice but to give up when they think it's impossible to meet the demands of their leader. Avoid this scenario by setting clear, attainable and measurable goals for employees and by being available for clarification or guidance. Provide constructive feedback and be sure to let workers know when they've done a job well.

Give appropriate rewards. Offer your employees incentives that will encourage them to excel in their creativity and skill, instead of clocking extra 'empty' or unproductive hours at work. Avoid rewards that only emphasize good attendance as this can actually backfire and promote presenteeism.

Map out standards. Set guidelines around the amount of overtime employees are allowed to work and encourage staff to use vacation time to recharge.

Get up-to-date. Once you begin the process of treating presenteeism, don't stop there. Follow up with employees to see how they're doing. This will also give you the chance to encourage workers face-to-face and identify any potential roadblocks to their performance.

As a leader, supporting a work environment where employees put in longer hours isn't necessarily the best way to increase productivity. It may be more beneficial to focus on fostering healthy working conditions that encourage staff to work smarter instead of longer. By maintaining an open door communication policy, setting clear and realistic goals and taking a proactive approach to employee challenges you'll win the staff's respect and set an inspiring example. More importantly, you'll gain or maintain the trust of your workers; so that when they're faced with a potential work-life conflict, they'll feel comfortable approaching you.

Taking the initiatives given above will help you prevent presenteeism from becoming an issue in your workplace. But if presenteeism does become a problem, remember, it's a problem that—through awareness, sensitivity and strategic action—can be solved.

Early Detection

The best way to deal with presenteeism is to prevent it from happening. Recognize presenteeism's first warning signs by:

Staying in the know. Keep an open line of communication with employees. Establishing an open door policy will help employees feel more comfortable approaching you when a personal problem arises that may affect job performance. It can also keep a potential problem from spiraling out of control and growing into a major issue.

Encouraging feedback. One of the challenges of managing others is to balance leadership with listening. Sometimes employees won't come to you, so it's vital to reach out to them for their thoughts and ideas.

Include questions that address presenteeism in your next employee survey such as: *What motivates you to do your best work? What do you think the company and/or your supervisor could do to help you achieve this?* Giving workers an outlet to express themselves anonymously may offer you some insights you would not have tapped into otherwise.

Keeping an eye out for presenteeism-like actions. Are there workers who are regularly keeping longer hours? Are there employees who need to be reminded of tasks repeatedly? Is your staff showing up for work sick, injured, stressed or burned-out?

Raising awareness. Let your employees know about services that can help them cope with day-to-day challenges and handle issues more effectively, including resources and support available through the Judges Counselling Program (JCP).

If you have any questions about this topic, or if you wish to discuss a personal situation you may be experiencing, we invite you to contact your JCP. All contact between you and your JCP is completely confidential.

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