

How to spot warning signs of chronic absenteeism

Issue: Employees who miss work frequently often show predictable patterns.

Benefit: Knowing which people are likely to avoid work can help cut costly absenteeism.

Action: Once you know how to spot absenteeism warning signs, take steps to address the underlying issues.

Absent employees cost the organization money, and chronic absenteeism is a chronic drain on the bottom line.

Typically, the direct and indirect costs associated with absenteeism eat up 5 percent to 17 percent of an organization's total payroll. And the top brass may be looking at HR for solutions.

How can you reduce absenteeism? The first step is to know the warning signs pointing to employees who are most likely to call in sick. The top predictors:

1. Previous absence record. The most reliable measures of employees' attendance are their past records. Make attendance inquiries a standard part of employment background checks.
2. Job characteristics. Employees in jobs that require low skill or involve repetitive tasks are more likely to experience attendance problems. Encourage supervisors to find ways to vary employee job routines and responsibilities when possible.
3. Stress. The more an employee feels stressed on the job, the more likely he or she is to avoid coming to work. Offer constructive ways for employees to deal with stress such as employee assistance programs, fitness center memberships and vacation scheduling.
4. Shift work. Employees who work nights or off hours tend to miss work more frequently because of conflicts with home and family responsibilities. If you employ shift workers, allow room for flexible leave policies.
5. Personal characteristics. Employees who show signs of aggression, instability and high sociability tend to miss work more often than others. Solution? Use selection processes such as psychological testing that identify those characteristics.