Our employees call in sick when time off isn't approved

**Question:** We have hourly employees who submit a request for days off and, when the days are not approved, they call in sick. Does anyone have a policy in place that would help with this problem? -- *Wendy*

**Comments**

I would save their request for time-off and then note on the sheet that it was denied. If and when they call in sick on that particular date, you have legitimate grounds to write them up or suspend them without pay.

*Posted by: Ferial Hassan | November 17, 2006 at 12:15 PM*

Require a doctor's note when this situation occurs.

*Posted by: | November 17, 2006 at 12:24 PM*

We do not have a written policy on this, but when we think someone is faking it, we will sometimes call them at home to verify they are there. However, with call forwarding, a person can easily get around this. The only other recourse is that people know that if they are seen around town anywhere other than to/from a doctor or store (for mediation), they can be suspended. We suspended someone for three days because she called in sick but yet was seen at a local restaurant at lunch. Once word got around about that, people knew that if they were calling in sick, they better either be at home, at the doctor, or out getting medication.

*Posted by: Mark | November 17, 2006 at 12:37 PM*

Documentation and counseling is recommended for this type of behavior. Counseling should include the information that probation will be the next step if this type of 'leave abuse' is seen as a pattern, with termination a possibility.

*Posted by: Kathy | November 17, 2006 at 12:41 PM*

Make it a written policy ahead of time that if an employee requests a day off and it's denied, and this employee later comes down ill, a doctor's note will be required releasing the employee to come back to work. What this means is that he/she cannot come back without that note. For the offenders, one of two things will happen: they...
will have to pay money to get to a doctor to get the note (e.g., an urgent care center) — or — they'll end up losing pay for any additional days they miss trying to see their own doctor. The key is telling people UP FRONT about the policy. (A lot of companies also have policies that if you call in sick the day before a holiday, you must also bring a doctor's note.)

**Posted by: Cindy Brock | November 17, 2006 at 01:17 PM**

Our SOP policy is if vacation request was denied and that person calls in sick the same day they requested off they must have a doctor's note stating they were sick and could not work and when they can return back to work. Once we put this policy into place this rarely ever occurs and on the occasion that it has and there was not a doctor's note time was docked. If a person calls in sick the day before or after a holiday the employee must furnish a doctor's note otherwise they are not paid for the day they called in sick on or the holiday.

**Posted by: Jo | November 17, 2006 at 01:22 PM**

We don't have this problem. Your days off are yours to use at your discretion: sick, personal, vacation, it's all the same. There are very few, if any, refusals of time off. Because of this, it is better for everyone that an employee give as much notice possible so you can do what you need to do ahead of time or make sure someone else is available to cover. There's never a reason to lie. Treat people with respect and you may find that they behave more responsibly.

**Posted by: Lisa | November 17, 2006 at 01:35 PM**

I agree with most of the comments here, it is great to have a policy regarding these types of issues. However, I feel that violations to this policy should be dealt with on a case by case biases. The majority of jobs in the admin field are between the hours of 7am & 6pm M-F, this leaves no time to accomplish personal tasks. When a company offers personal time off most employees assume if something personal comes up they can request to use their personal time. If time is denied that does not change the fact that that employee had something to do that day. The reason I feel so strongly about this topic is because I had a situation where I requested a personal day (which I had accumulated) for extremely personal medical purposes, the day was denied. I had no choice but to call in sick that day, of course I could have brought in a doctors note, but that would have defeat the purpose of it being personal. I realize that some employees use personal days to have lunch with a friend, but none the less personal days are just that – personal. If an employee really needs off they will take off no matter what. In my opinion when companies stick to strict policies like this one they risk loosing great employees.

**Posted by: Kristen | November 17, 2006 at 02:03 PM**

As I was reading Lisa's comments it was as if I had written them. I too work at a place where we have PTO (personal time off) to use at our discretion. Also, very few refusals of your T/O request. For our department, administration, we three women cover for each other and when time off is needed we check with each other then ask the VP's we support and it has never been denied or questioned, even if one of us request that afternoon off, the morning of. Other departments such as nursing, housekeeping, etc. that would have a larger staff are held closer to the policy on attendance as there are more people to deal with and not all of their requests will be granted. If an employee then calls in "sick" they will be given a verbal warning. If employees know up-front what is expected, by way of a policy, they usually abide.
Our large corporation uses 'Paid' Time Off (PTO). Employees receive a set amount of days, according to their number of years of service. Time off must by requested one day in advanced and approved by an employee's boss. There are no questions asked as to why the time off is needed. If there were a last minute request, such as a sick day, the time can be approved by their boss and it is noted as an unplanned request. The company policy has guidelines if there are an excessive number unplanned days. Typically, the Health Department would use policy guidelines to follow up in detail with the employee. This system lets the employee determine how to budget their time off. It is amazing how many employees do not use their PTO days for "sick days". Rather, they are diligent to be at work every day possible so they can use the PTO days for vacations, etc. If an employee is too sick to work, their fellow employees use a little peer pressure to encourage that person to get well before coming to work.

I also agree of a policy where if you become ill on a day before/after a holiday or on a denied time off request you must return to work with a doctors note. We even do that when we feel they called out and were not sick.

I also have the feeling that you are having an unusual problem and maybe you are denying an awful lot of time off. Either maybe your policy doesn't make the employees give you enough notice, you are under staffed or deny without good reason. we have 82 employees and have never had this problem and deny very few requests.

At my current workplace, like Lisa, we have very few refusals, so I don't think we have a policy in effect here. However, at a past workplace, they were extremely strict on their policies.

If someone was denied time off, then called in sick, they were required to bring in a doctor's note, and they were also given a warning. First warning is verbal, not recorded.

However, we also had only 5 sick days. 1st day, verbal warning, not recorded. 2nd day, verbal warning, recorded. 3rd day, written warning. 4th day, written warning letting you know one more and you were terminated. After using your 5th sick day, you were given your notice and terminated (this doesn't include sick days in a row). And we were always required to bring in notes.

If you called in sick on a Friday, a Monday, a day before or after a holiday/vacation, you were required to bring in a doctor's note, and showing you were sick, the sick day, AND the holiday/vacation/weekend if need be. If you could not produce a doctor's note, you were not paid.

Like I said, they were extremely strict. And it didn't do a lot for morale. It also made people come into work sick more often (and of course, passing germs onto other employees). But we also had excellent attendance.

You just need to weigh your options. How "scared" do you want your employees to be?

good luck.
We also do PTO at my office; however, it is a policy that if you call in sick the day surrounding a holiday or paid day off, you will not be paid for the holiday/PDO. In essence, if you were getting the flu on the eve of Thanksgiving, you had better not be sick the day after, because you will not get paid for Thanksgiving Day if you take the next day off.

That, I must argue, is unfair.

**Posted by: | November 20, 2006 at 02:26 PM**

On orientation day, we were told we get X personal days so we "don't have to call in at 8 a.m. with our 'sick voice.'" We are treated as adults and as such, we are respectful of our co-workers and only call in sick at 8 a.m. with our sick voice if we are legitimately sick.

**Posted by: | November 23, 2006 at 11:14 PM**