

# Worker calls in sick after boss denies requested day off: Now what?

**Problem:** Suppose fall is the company's busiest period of the year, a time for overtime and seven-day shifts. A veteran employee asks for time off so she could help chaperone her daughter's class field trip, and you turn her down. She calls in sick on that date.

*What would you do?*

**The answer:** You must consider a number of factors before taking any action. Although circumstantial evidence indicates that the employee took an unauthorized day off, there is a possibility that she may have been sick. But you must take some action or your authority will be seriously undermined. Other employees who had been forced to follow the rule will be watching carefully to see what happens. If the answer is "nothing," you can count on a number of other convenient "illnesses."

To address situations like this, try these tactics:

- **Examine the past record.** Are there any other instances of insubordination or questionable behavior from the employee? Has the employee been disciplined in the past? How and for what? How are her performance appraisals?
- **Get the facts.** Did the employee recognize that she was breaking a rule? Is there a possibility that the rule wasn't broken? Might she really have been sick? Did you call to find out how she was and receive no answer? Don't try to make a disciplinary decision until you know all the circumstances.
- **How have you dealt with other employees** who have broken the same rule? The discipline must be consistent with both your policy and past practice. You have the right to be less severe with a veteran employee with a good record than a newcomer with a series of bad reports, as long as your policy gives you flexibility.
- **Is the policy creating the problem?** Could you consider some sort of accommodation that would allow options, such as employees covering for each other during busy periods? An insubordinate act by a good employee might be an indication that a change is in order. If the insubordinate act is committed by a continually troublesome individual, keep these rules of thumb in mind.
- **Base the confrontation with the worker** only on her job performance. Never allow any personal prejudices, comments, observations or suggestions to get in the way of the counseling/discipline meeting. Make certain that the employee knows exactly what you're saying. Allow no room for confusion or misunderstanding.
- **Don't make value judgments.** Stick to the job description at hand, not what you think of the employee personally.
- **Don't continually harangue the employee** on a certain point. Make your point once and go on.
- **Don't make idle or thinly veiled threats.** Making threats only serves to make the confrontation less

productive and strains relations even more.