

The case against offering perfect-attendance awards



Absenteeism is an issue that affects all employers, all year long. How do you motivate employees to cut down on absenteeism? Offering perfect-attendance awards may not be the right carrot. Here's why.

1. **It won't motivate the employees** who feel that achieving perfect attendance is too lofty of a goal. You'll likely find that it's the same employees getting the award; the others won't care and won't bother.
2. **It'll drive some employees** to get to work no matter what—no matter that they have the flu and wind up infecting others who then have to take sick days.
3. **It punishes non-abusers.** Theoretically, an attendance award is supposed to motivate those with poor attendance who see nothing wrong with calling out “sick” in order to recover at the mall, a casino, or the beach. However, you'll wind up having to take the award away from an employee who has a great attendance record, but then has the bad luck of having his or her car break down one day.
4. **The award must be just right.** Too large—see No. 2. Too small—see No. 1. Giving extra time off is counter to the goal of the award, which is having employees at work.
5. **Watch the Family and Medical Leave Act.** You know you cannot count FMLA absences against employees. But does the employee who misses out on the award due to a one-day absence for a family emergency and sees a co-worker receive the award despite being out for weeks at a time? You can explain the law all you want, but the employee will likely still be demotivated when comparing attendance records.
6. **Beware of how you define “perfect.”** It should never include legally protected time off, such as jury duty. You also don't want to discourage employees from using vacation time because it sends the message that your company doesn't respect employees' need to relax and recharge.

What to do instead

Should you really reward employees for doing what's expected of them: showing up for work on time every day?

Treating absenteeism like the disciplinary issue it is may be more effective at curbing abuse. Follow your company's discipline policy when employees violate the attendance policy. Rate attendance, reliability, and/or dependability on performance appraisals.