

# How to weather winter, HR's busiest season



Cold weather and winter holidays keep HR pros busier than usual. Here are some ways to get through the season unscathed:

## Snow days

The value of telework is rarely as obvious as on a day when the weather prevents employees from getting to work.

If you have equipped employees to work from home—making sure each has a computer and remote access to files they may need—a snow day doesn't have to be a day off for most of your employees.

Before the season's first snowflake falls in your locale:

- Identify employees—especially exempt staff whom you have to pay whether they work or not—as candidates for telework. Do at least some minimal training so you'll know if their equipment can handle a day of home-based work and so the employee will understand the company's expectations for productivity while working remotely.
- Create a plan for bad-weather days and let employees know what it is. Alert them to the rules for leaving work early, working from home, taking the snow day off and whether they will be paid.

## Auld days

Between planning the company holiday party and distributing end-of-year bonuses, HR pros rarely have a minute to celebrate the season in their own department. Consider breaking that pattern this year.

A few tips from HR consultants:

- Use the post-holiday lull to write a year-end report about HR's accomplishments and challenges during the past 12 months. This will help you and your colleagues reflect on jobs well done and figure out how not to repeat past mistakes.
- Plan for the coming year—or at least as far ahead as you can. Make New Year's resolutions as a team so everyone will work toward the same end once everyone's back at work on Jan. 2.
- Clean your office—and encourage the rest of the HR team to do the same. A clean work space can create the feeling of a fresh start. That's a good way to ring in the new year.
- Take a break. You tell everyone else to, which is why the place is half empty on Dec. 26. Take your own

advice, and reserve a few year-end days for yourself.

## **Sick days**

Plenty of employees will be faking the flu so they can skip work to get ready for the holidays. But many more really will have it—and they should stay home.

But they often don't. And that leads to more sick employees—and more unscheduled absences. How to get sick workers to stay home?

Let them know it's OK if they do.

Don't penalize an employee who takes a couple of sick days, even covertly. A snide comment from a supervisor who had to scramble to find a temp or a flip remark from an exec who never calls in sick herself can send the message that employees who call in sick are too much trouble.

Here are three ways to let employees know it's safe to suffer at home instead of dragging themselves to work when they can barely climb out of bed:

1. Encourage managers and executives to say so during staff meetings, in their blogs and by sending emails to employees.
2. Convince supervisors and leaders to stay home when they're sick. Modeling the behavior will create employees who are more confident that they're doing the right thing by keeping their germs to themselves.
3. Send employees home if they're obviously symptomatic when they show up for work. Allow employees who are feeling bad enough to stay home but well enough to do a little work to get credit for part of the day if they produce some work remotely.

## **Happy days**

A year-end bonus might not be the gift your employees want this year.

Spherion's second annual WorkSphere survey confirms that just 22% of employees say their compensation is the reason they're happy on the job. Nearly as many cite company culture, likeable co-workers and work they're passionate about as nearly as more important. Surprisingly, 7% of employees in the survey rated workplace flexibility as less significant than compensation when it comes to their job happiness.

A separate survey by communications firm Unify, however, found the opposite: 43% of employees in that poll said they would choose flex over a pay raise.

Still, most employees appreciate a little flexibility around the holidays, when they add decorating, shopping, baking, entertaining and socializing to their already-full schedules.

## **Long days**

Challenger, Gray & Christmas estimates that retailers are hiring more seasonal workers this winter than any year since 1999.

Researchers at PI Worldwide caution against hiring too quickly and training the newcomers too slowly. They also recommend:

- Using automation. Especially if your organization is hiring hundreds or thousands of seasonal employees, rely on an automated screening system.

- Choosing temps who have the same skills as existing employees who do the same job well.
  - Writing comprehensive job descriptions that you can refer to as you determine whether a candidate has the knowledge, skills and abilities you need.
  - Tailoring training of new hires so it's specific to the job at hand. Temps don't need the depth of cultural indoctrination that permanent employees do. Ramp them up quickly and put them to work.
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## **Dodge winter's woes: Be careful out there**

In the Midwest, nearly a third of workers' comp claims result from slips and falls on ice and snow while working.

Accident Fund Insurance Company of America and United Heartland report that winter slips and falls doubled last year and represented 29% of all workers' comp claims. The numbers were highest in Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan and Illinois, where winters are especially harsh.

The insurers encourage employers to review their snow and ice removal plans and to enforce proper salting, back-healthy shoveling techniques and the use of slip-resistant footwear.

In addition, the groups suggest that employers remind all employees to:

- Walk slowly and deliberately and wear boots or other slip-resistant footwear.
- Be prepared for black ice to form after paved surfaces have been cleared.
- Exercise caution when getting in and out of vehicles.
- Watch for slippery floors when entering buildings.
- Avoid carrying items, keep hands empty so arms are free to move for stabilization. Use backpacks if possible.