

# Get your employee attendance policy right



One of the most common employee issues that businesses experience is poor attendance. Excessive absenteeism and tardiness hurt the flow of business operations.

However, many businesses contribute to this problem by not setting clear expectations. If your business doesn't have a written attendance and tardiness policy, employees may be unclear on what is expected of them when reporting a delay or unforeseen absence. Set them up for success by developing policies and procedures around absences, tardiness, and timekeeping.

## Why do you need an employee attendance policy?

Having clear attendance expectations helps the company, managers, and employees. Expectations can vary based on industry, company culture, job role, and more, so do not expect that everyone joining your organization will automatically know what is considered appropriate or expected. Clearly spell out attendance, time tracking, and time-off policies to ensure that everyone is on the same page.

## Attendance policies and company culture

Your attendance policy can be stricter or more relaxed depending on your company's culture. Being unnecessarily strict can hurt employee morale, however, overly relaxed policies may be abused.

## When deciding what constitutes tardiness or an attendance violation consider:

- **What do you want to consider as late?** Is it arriving 5 minutes, 15 minutes, or 30 minutes after their scheduled start time? Employees need to understand when to call in to let their supervisor know that they're running late and when they shouldn't bother. Roles in which an employee will be relieving another staff member, opening up the office or establishment, or supporting customers at the start of their shift will demand more punctuality. If your office is in an urban downtown setting, giving a 5 or 10 minute buffer may be more practical, as public transit delays may frequently impact staff.

- **What level of flexibility do you want to provide?** In some office settings, the clock in and clock out times are less important as long as the number of required work hours per day or workweek are met. Do you want to give employees a more flexible work schedule or have them adhere to a set start time?
- **What is your company culture?** Are employees generally given a great deal of freedom or autonomy? What is communication between management and staff like? Craft a policy that fits your culture. More formal traditional company cultures suit stricter policies. Laid-back cultures may allow for flexible start times.

Decide what guidelines work best for your business and what the management team will be able to reasonably track and enforce. There may be more leeway on tardiness or early departure if work times are flexible. It may also be harder to monitor the punctuality of remote staff members if clock-ins or morning check-ins are not required. However, even more flexible roles should have an attendance policy in place as proper communication is still needed for unplanned absences or heavily delayed start times.

## Other considerations

### Call-out procedure

Employees should also be informed of how to call out or report if they are running late. Sometimes this is written into the employee attendance policy. In some organizations, it may vary by department, in which case each department manager should inform their staff of the expectations and procedure.

Let employees know how much notice is expected. In roles in which management may attempt to find coverage for an absent employee's shift, requesting additional notice when possible, such as two hours notice, of anticipated absences is reasonable.

### Excused vs. unexcused absences

An excused absence is any absence that has been approved by the employee's supervisor or manager.

Excused Absences include scheduled or unscheduled time off such as:

- Vacation
- Sick leave
- Jury Duty
- FMLA leave
- Any other recognized form of leave or paid time off

Not all absences will be able to be properly planned and scheduled. Employees may wake up sick and need to call out for the day. An unexpected absence should still be excused if they took the proper steps to notify their supervisor in accordance with company policy if the absence is due to something that could not reasonably be

foreseen such as illness or injury. Doctors' notes may be required if an employee needs to take several consecutive unplanned sick days.

Unexcused absences are absences that are not approved or did not follow the set procedure. For example, if someone calls out sick after their scheduled shift already started.

## **Sample attendance policy template**

[Company Name] expects all employees to maintain regular and prompt attendance.

If you are unable to report to work, you must notify your supervisor or department head no later than 30 minutes before your start time on each day of your absence. If you leave a voicemail message for your supervisor or department head concerning your absence, a personal follow-up call must be made by noon on the same day of the absence. Failure to properly notify the company of your absence may result in disciplinary action.

Absenteeism or tardiness that is unexcused or excessive may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

## **Disciplinary action for attendance infractions**

Attendance issues are a common cause for disciplinary action. Be sure to properly document violations of your company's attendance policy including unauthorized absences, tardiness, or early departures. Having proper documentation will help if you need to take disciplinary action or coach employees on attendance issues.

### **When to take disciplinary action**

It is up to you when to take disciplinary action. Some companies have a more laid-back culture where occasional tardiness is not a big deal. This is more common in office-based non-customer-facing roles where late arrival may not have as large of an impact on the business and other workers.

However, in many job roles arriving late without proper warning can cause problems. In a job role where the person arriving is expected to relieve another staff member who needs to go to lunch or clock out for the day, being late has a negative impact. The person waiting for relief may accrue unapproved overtime or a meal period violation (depending on state laws around lunch periods). In these instances, a written warning may be appropriate for only one or two instances of tardiness.

### **Discipline procedures**

For attendance problems, it's often best to use progressive discipline for attendance infractions. Life happens, and most people will occasionally be tardy. Start off with a verbal warning and progress to more formal methods such as a written warning if improvement does not occur.

Some employers choose to use a point system. Points or partial points are assigned to varying degrees of lateness or absenteeism, employees that rack up enough points during a set period (month, quarter, etc) will face consequences. Employees may receive 1 point for being 10 minutes late, and 2 points for being 15 or 30 minutes late to a scheduled shift. There may also be points for unexcused absences. After an employee accumulates a set number of points they may receive a write-up or be placed on probation. This can be helpful for tracking tardiness and attendance issues, particularly if you have a lot of employees and require strict adherence to start times.

If you do not require workers to clock in and out, the point system will not work well for your company. Many employers track time through timesheets rather than a time clock system, and minor tardiness may not be

reflected. It is also common not to require salaried workers to clock in and out to record their time since they are not paid according to hours worked nor does overtime need to be recorded.

Of course, there are instances where progressive discipline is not fitting, and more immediate measures might need to be taken.

### **No-call no-Shows**

Many companies have a zero-tolerance policy on no-call no-shows. If an employee does not show up for work and does not properly communicate that they will be absent, disciplinary action is reasonable and should be taken. Of course, there will be times where communication does not come until after the absence due to extenuating circumstances such as a life-threatening emergency or a serious car accident on the way to work. However, documentation such as a doctor's note can be requested to verify that there was an emergency that prevented them from taking the proper steps to call out for the day. If an employee no-call no-shows for several consecutive days (the number of days required varies by state, it is often three), it can be considered job abandonment.

### **Implementing your attendance policy**

Once you have a policy in place, management and the staff both need to follow the guidelines set. Be sure to be fair and consistent in implementing and enforcing the policy.

There will be some occasions where adjustments need to be made, such as in ADA or Family and Medical Leave cases where extra time off is permitted. Those with these additional allotments should still communicate actively with human resources and their supervisor to provide notice of time off in accordance with the attendance policy.

Be sure to update the policy as needed and make sure all employees are provided with a copy of the policy and any updates.

**Additional resource:** Updating your handbooks and company policies? Check our guide to [employee handbooks](#).