

## Top ten ways to reduce sick leave

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### **Keep workers and reduce sick leave with a dose of sick leave sugar (and a dash of lemon!)**

Organisations keen to reduce sick leave can benefit from a little homespun wisdom. You catch more flies, the old saying goes, with honey than vinegar. By which we mean that punitive measures for reducing sick leave are likely to be less effective than measures that sweet-talk workers into WANTING to come to work. Here's our top ten sick leave busting sugar-cubes, with just a dash of lemon.

#### **ONE**

**Have clear policies and procedures regarding work absence.** Employees should know who to contact, how contact should be made (for example, whether text messaging, emailing or calling is appropriate) and when notification of absence must be made (for example, by 930am on the day of absence). There should also be clarity regarding requirements for medical certificates and methods for dealing with habitual absenteeism. Fairness and consistency are important. If you want people to respect the system, it has to be worthy of their respect.

#### **TWO**

**Offer tangible support** to those with an injury or illness that requires more than a day or two off work. Send a card from the whole team. Make a phone call and ask if there's anything the organisation can do to help. Let the person know that they're missed and appreciated. Most people feel vulnerable when they're sick or sore and a kind word can do a world of good. Pragmatically, it is also likely to increase the person's desire to return to work.

#### **THREE**

**Switch on supervisors and managers** to the most effective ways of managing and reducing sick leave. Help them understand that focusing on LTIs (lost time injury) alone will not achieve the results they want. Supervisors and managers who extend empathy, support and trust to workers tend to see better outcomes than those focused on meeting their KPIs (key performance indicators) at all costs. Read more on the research [here](#).



#### FOUR

**Make allowance for non-medical leave and flexible working arrangements**, to enable people to balance their personal life and work without resorting to “sickies”. For example, studies have shown that sick leave rises during school holidays, when parental responsibilities compete with work responsibilities. Where appropriate, allowing parents to work from home as required during these periods can assist them to keep an eye on their kids while also ensuring the job gets done.

#### FIVE

**Have a positive working environment.** People are much more likely to take a “mental health day” if they dread going to work. Happy workplaces are ones in which employees are listened to, workloads are achievable and fair, and social support is encouraged. When the workplace is a happy place, workers will want to be in it!

#### SIX

**Address any concerns regarding job security.** Workers who feel that their job is not secure tend to take more sick days than those who believe themselves to be in stable employment. Dealing with issues around job security in an honest and supportive way is the best option if their concerns are justified. If not, make sure they know it. A sense of security reduces sick leave.

#### SEVEN

**Don't let conflict fester in the workplace.** Workplace conflict, including personality clashes, bullying and conflict between supervisors / managers and workers can be harmful if it is not dealt with quickly and effectively. Not only can festering conflict lead to short term absences—“I just can't deal with Jasmine Jerk, I need a day off!”—it can also contribute to stress claims and other psychological injuries, which tend to be complex, long-term and expensive. Actively manage conflict, and offer mediation where appropriate.

#### EIGHT

**Acknowledge good work** with verbal praise and / or financial rewards. No one likes to feel unappreciated. When people perform well, let them know. A person who feels engaged with



their work, a person who knows them self to be valued, is less likely to take time off unless they really need it.

## NINE

**Be accommodating.** Sick leave karma can work for you or against you. On one hand, making modified duties available to someone temporarily unable to perform their regular duties reduces their need to take time off work. On the other hand, making a fuss about allowing someone two hours away from their desk to attend a psychologist's appointment increases the chance that they'll take the day off work next time rather than broach the subject again. When it comes to sick leave, you get what you give.

## TEN

**Don't let breaches of your policies and procedures slide.** Sick leave sugar is all very well, but people also need to understand that there are consequences associated with taking advantage of the system. Habitual absenteeism and other breaches (hello, foolhardy Facebook updates!) should be dealt with swiftly, predictably and fairly. As promised, a squeeze of lemon.

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