IMPROVING ATTENDANCE AT WORK

The estimated cost of absence to the UK as a whole is over £12 billion a year, with stress the single largest cause of occupational ill health, in the public sector accounting for around half of all days lost to work-related ill health. There is an obvious link between sickness absence, efficiency and productivity. Please see our link about stress for further information.

The key to avoiding unnecessary absenteeism is a well-designed reward package and good management, with managers managing performance and dealing with absence.

Employees who are incentivised through a challenging work environment, culture and reward package show improved attendance and are enthused and engaged to do their best for the organisation. But there is little evidence that cash bonuses for attendance are successful in isolation as a solution.

Organisations perhaps need to think creatively about remunerating those who are absent, for example by providing a pay scheme which drifts down gradually during absence - rather than going from full pay to far lower levels in large drops. If this is aligned with a staff welfare or rehabilitation programme, it would ensure employees return to work as soon as they can. Responsibility for absenteeism usually lies with line managers who too often avoid challenging employees about sensitive or medical issues. This failure to address the problem could result in enhanced absenteeism when psychological disorders, stress or discrimination issues are not tackled early enough.

Routine return-to-work interviews will solve most absence problems. Managers need to know why they should tackle absenteeism. And they need to know how to do it to reduce absenteeism in your organisation.

Employees also need to understand the return-to-work interview. They need to know why absence matters and what their manager will want to talk to them about when they return from a period of absence.

Equipping your employees with a greater knowledge about what they can expect from the return-to-work interview will help them understand the system and their responsibility for their absence.

Taking a performance management approach to improving attendance saves money and supports employees. Please look at our link about Performance Management to
find out more about introducing a performance management approach within your organisation.

We can train your managers to use the W.A.R.M. approach to absenteeism:

- **Welcome** - welcome them back; tell them they were missed
- **Absence** - discuss the absence; are they fit to return?
- **Responsibility** - explain that being absent means they have a problem; talk about how they are going to solve it
- **Move on** - focus on getting back to work; end on an upbeat note.

Having a strategy for attendance will have a positive impact on behaviour, working climate, staff well-being, confidence, communication and control of emotions. Coaching attendance successfully will reduce defensive reactions from staff and ensure consistency in behaviour from managers evolving to staff. The supportive, mutually respectful non-judgemental approach will give managers (and staff) the confidence to admit to problems and be open and reflective in finding solutions.

Other contributory factors to success include:

- the commitment of the senior management team
- working hours/workload pressure & any flexible working hours practices
- an organisational approach, with the participation of all managers
- sufficient time being available for trust to develop and feedback to be given
- the presence or not of any welfare support systems, HR policies to reduce stress or manage return to work interviews
- up-to-date absence data
- the presence of a performance management process (please see our performance management link)
- any initiatives that show the value of staff (see our employee engagement link)
- levels of motivation within the culture of the organisation, and indeed the culture of the organisation. Please see the links on motivation and culture building

Irrespective of size, organisations can justify outsourcing certain functions of absence management to trained experts. Outsourcing interrogation services by setting up designated help-lines shifts the focus from line managers to medical experts. Not only will this deter malingers, it also establishes whether employees are genuinely ill and identifies opportunities to rehabilitate!

There does however need to be a consistent, fair and sympathetic approach to promoting attendance at work, with employees being able to expect fair treatment, a supportive approach from management, confidentiality, consistency from managers and adherence to effective procedures.

Please call us now on 01460 61459 to discuss improving attendance within your organisation.
IMPROVING ATTENDANCE AT WORK PROGRAMME (an outline)

When employees are absent from their work it causes all sorts of problems, irrespective of whether or not they are front line staff. Absence disrupts operations and customer service and affects morale. We have to spend extra money on temporary cover or overtime. Unchecked absence can lead to bad feeling, conflict and disciplinary action, including dismissal. That, in turn, can lead to tribunal hearings and even compensation payments if we are unable to prove that we have acted fairly.

Our training modules and workbooks are aimed at helping you to deal with employee absence in an effective way. We will go through workbooks together ensuring information is built upon in a logical sequence. In that way information will build up in a logical sequence.

By the end of the course, delegates will:

- Understand the importance of managing attendance
- Be aware of what is involved in controlling absenteeism
- Understand their role in controlling and reducing it
- Identify the range of possible causes of absenteeism
- Be able to conduct effective return to work interviews in a range of circumstances
- Have developed their confidence in interviewing staff on their return to work