



Author

Absent and Tardy Employees

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Introduction

Employees that are absent and tardy to work are major concerns for farm owners, supervisors and managers.

Too much management time is spent on problems related to attendance and too many farm supervisors and managers tend to be casual about it. That will not work. You need a plan. Here are things that actually encourage poor attendance:

- Out of date leave policies under which employees lose unused leave. Scrap the old “use it-or-lose it” policy.
- Employee awareness of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA);
- “Flexible scheduling” that makes it hard to see who is tardy and who is absent;

When attendance and tardy policies are implemented, they must be communicated accurately to all employees -- they must know and understand what the attendance expectations are and how their attendance and tardy records will affect their advancement, performance ratings, discipline and employment.

Here are some suggestions for getting a handle on absent and tardiness:

- Assemble your own “Employee of Work Handbook.” This record should contain a copy of everything related to attendance, including policies, SOPs, forms and so on
- Establish clear expectations. Typically, that would include everyone involved following all policies, practices and principles:
 - o It is the employee’s responsibility to request leave and provide documentation for time needed;
 - o It is the manager’s responsibility (not the bookkeeper’s) to grant leave.
- Follow certain absolutes. When you adhere to certain absolute rules, you can manage troubles easily.

As with many workplace policies, a positive approach usually works better than a negative one. The first steps to control absenteeism and tardiness should be:

1. Holding a unit or department competition and awarding a small bonus to the group with the best attendance record for a month or quarter.
2. Apply attendance records as a factor in granting promotions and salary increases.
3. Establish an attendance award to the employees who meet certain attendance standards.
4. Establish a sick leave program that does not pay employees for the first (1-3) days of illness.
5. Pay for all unused sick leave time at year-end or when the employee leaves the farm or organization. Get this

- time off your books and close the record.
6. Allow employees to carry-over sick leave from year to year (but for no more than 3 years) or convert it to vacation or personal days.

Many times when an employee calls in sick, they are not really sick, they are just taking a “personal day” off. You might consider the concept of “personal days” -- give employees 2-4 “personal days” after they’ve been on the job for 3 years -- they can use the time for personal business, bereavement, whatever.

More and more employers are starting to use “personal days” exclusively. Under these plans, each employee receives a number of personal days, rather than sick days, each year. Employees may take personal days at any time, for any reason (with proper notice where possible). This policy can improve employee morale.

As a farm owner, supervisor, or manager you must establish clear policies for attendance or tardiness and you must set steps for discipline when your policy is abused, starting with something like this:

Sample Policy

1. An employee who is absent or tardy twice during a single pay period will be given a verbal warning and the supervisor will write a report about the verbal warning that will be forwarded to (insert appropriate person or title) and placed in their employment file.
2. An employee who is absent or tardy within a 15-day period after the verbal warning will receive a written warning and the supervisor/manager will forward a copy of the written warning to (insert appropriate person or title) and placed in their employment file.
3. An employee who is absent or tardy within a 15-day period after the written warning will be suspended without pay for 3 to 5 days. The supervisor will consult with (insert appropriate person or title) to determine the length of the suspension, and whether the employee should be returned to “probationary” status or terminated after the suspension.
4. The supervisor of any employee who is absent or tardy within a 30 day period after suspension will give (insert appropriate person or title) a notice of the absence or tardiness. (insert appropriate person or title) will be responsible for decisions on all terminations.

Owners, supervisors, and managers should carefully monitor any attendance or tardiness policy that is put in place -- adherence to a strict attendance policy may be unlawful failing to give an employee time off would be a reasonable accommodation for a disability covered by the ADA.

Steps in Dealing with Absent or Tardy Employees

Step 1

Ask employee why they were tardy as soon as possible after they finally arrive at work. Do not wait until lots of tardiness piles up. They need to know you’re concerned and have noticed the problem. It also helps to tell the employees that they are letting other employees down when they are not there to do the work.

Step 2

Ask the employee what they will do to come to work on time. Agree on a plan or steps the employee will take to improve their record.

Step 3

Make a list of all of the tardiness that includes the date, what happened and the reason if you know it. Review this list with the employee. Tell them very clearly that you expect them to come to work when they are scheduled and what will happen if they do not.

Step 4

Write a written warning or memo that summarizes the conversation in Step 3. Give the employees a copy of the memo and have them sign it as an acknowledgment that they received it. Place memo in employees employment file.

Step 5

Decide on and apply consistent discipline for continued problems. Identify a standard that will trigger discipline, such as tardy four times in a month.

Step 6

Keep monitoring attendance. Tell the employee when they improve and when they slip remind them of the potential consequences if they continue to be tardy.

Step 7

If the problem does not improve and you have given the employees warnings, do not be afraid to fire them for tardiness. Standards will not be effective if you do not stick to them.

Tips & Warnings

- Combine tardiness with absences and discipline for attendance problems. In both cases, the employees are not there and someone has to cover for them or your operation suffers.
- Treat all employees the same when it comes to being absent or tardy. When a good employee suddenly starts coming in tardy, do not ignore it just because they are so valuable.
- When new employees are tardy take action quickly. If a new person is tardy, it does not get better.
- Do not discipline an employee for taking advantage of their rights under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). If you are covered under the act and they follow proper procedures, they are protected.
- Do not keep employees around who are always tardy because it is hard to hire new ones. You are setting a standard and example for other employees.