

How To Handle Absenteeism With Employee Absence Management

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Introduction


Absenteeism is amongst the bigger problems a restaurant faces and it can lead to big hurdles in regular operations and even closure if it is done excessively and regularly. It is not something that can be easily overlooked and needs to be addressed well in time. Restaurant owners and managers need to know about the cost of absenteeism in restaurants and what challenges it can cause to management. Understanding more about absenteeism will aid the management in ensuring smooth business operations.



Chapter One

ABSENTEEISM 101





Absenteeism, according to Wikipedia, is a habitual pattern of absence from a duty or obligation without good reason. It generally stands for unplanned absences. It is usually viewed as a poor performance indicator for an employee, as well as a breach of an implicit contract. Leaves are viewed as such when permission hasn't been sought beforehand, and there is no valid reason given even later. Regular absenteeism can disrupt work processes and affect overall productivity.

In the case of restaurants, continuous absenteeism can overload the rest of the staff causing further problems. It can also lead to unsatisfactory service for customers, and managerial issues for the management. Frequent absences of employees can lead to high costs for the restaurant and morale damper for other employees. When an employee calls in to inform of a leave – sick leave or otherwise – last minute, it becomes problematic for the managers to fill the shift quickly in

time. Oftentimes, the staff that is working already is asked to fill in the gap by working overtime. The stress caused by this is not healthy and can lower the morale of the staff that is working. If certain employees are partaking in absenteeism regularly, the burden causes on the other staff can have them dissatisfied and looking elsewhere for a better working environment.

Absenteeism needs to be documented. Warnings need to be given, and non-absenteeism needs to be encouraged. There needs to be proper documentation of rules and regulations regarding absenteeism that all the managers and employees need to know about beforehand. This way, if an employee does not take the warnings seriously and continues to take unwarranted leaves, their employment can be terminated after a set number of warnings. The manager then has to fill up the position to ensure no loss of productivity takes place in the restaurant.

Causes Of Absenteeism

There are many reasons why an employee will take an unplanned leave. It can be a medical reason – falling sick themselves or someone in their family falling sick, having a doctor's appointment for self or family, etc. Overworked employees too end up falling sick because of stress at work and feeling stretched thin. This not just leads to lower morale but also might cause depression. According to the research *"Prevalence and predictors of work-related depression, anxiety and stress among waiters"*, around 40% of the research subjects suffered from depression while those with anxiety were more than 50% and around 35% had stress.

According to the American Institute Of Stress, "stress causes around one million employees to miss work every day". Gallup reported in 2013 that in that year alone, absenteeism caused by poor health resulted in a loss of productivity, and it cost more than \$84 billion.


With the recent pandemic and the changing demands and needs, these problems would have increased. With such major issues, employees will call in sick. But having a good work environment and culture where all employees are given their due salaries, not over-worked, and have a healthy environment to work in, will reduce such problems. Other reasons for absenteeism can be new job interviews, family emergencies, or even problems with co-workers. If it is the latter, instead of calling in for a leave, the employee needs to inform the management and any issues need to be sorted out.

Any restaurant's success is not just dependent on the menu they have on offer, but also on the service they provide. Any issues in that, and the business can suffer as customer feedback might get negative depending on their experience at the place.

Chapter Two

TEAM DYNAMICS





No restaurant is a one-man show. It is based on a team of staff – salaried or hourly-paid ones – that works in the kitchen, wait staff, cleaning staff and of course, the manager or managers. The number of staff for each position is specific, depending on what's required for the smooth running of the shifts. Staff reports to work depending on shift and the running of the restaurant is smooth, as long as everyone works on time, and without unplanned leaves. Even if one person takes an unscheduled leave, the slack needs to be picked up by the rest of the staff. Sometimes, someone else who isn't supposed to do that shift is called in, other times the rest of the staff in that shift needs to multi-task and get the work done, whether it is the wait staff, cleaning staff, kitchen staff, or even the manager. Each person has their specified work to do, and this adds to their already full work schedule. This dampens the team morale and can cause major issues if the employee engaging in absenteeism does it regularly. It also causes the employees who do work to get overworked and stressed. This impacts the work the environment in the restaurant and the employees who work


might start looking for work elsewhere for better work culture and lesser stress.

To ensure the staff morale remains high and the staff happy, one needs to ensure a good working environment at the restaurant. Happy employees make for a productive and efficient business. According to a research paper 'Happiness and Productivity' from the University of Warwick, happiness in people led to them being 12% more productive. Those who are not happy – with work culture, constantly changing shift timings, having to work overtime, etc. – do not feel as invested in the work they do, and in turn, the restaurant, the overall productivity reduces. One way to keep a good, working team dynamic is to have open communication between employees themselves and the management. Absenteeism and the problems it causes will reduce if there are proper means of communication that can be used by the employees when required so that they can inform about leaves and emergencies in time.

Chapter Three

COST OF ABSENTEEISM





The bottom line and productivity are what all business owners or management aim at maintaining. Anything that hampers the two is what creates hurdles in the process, and impacts the business negatively.

Absenteeism is amongst the biggest problems that cause these hurdles. For loss of productivity and money, the whole team, and especially the managers are held responsible. So, it is their job to ensure a proper system is in place where employees don't lack morale, avoid absenteeism, and work as per the set guidelines. The cost of absenteeism can become a monetary setback that affects the business drastically, if not handled in time.

One of the most obvious costs of absenteeism is overtime. Anyone working beyond the set time in a week needs to be paid for the overtime. Most states have stringent laws on the same. Overtime costs are higher than the regular hourly rates, so the added hours become an expensive deal. Alternatively, if the hourly wage workers are not called for overtime to balance the absent employee, then the manager himself or herself ends up

picking up the load. This takes him or her away from their actual duties, which too is not an ideal situation.


Absenteeism also causes a higher turnover rate. When employees do their work properly and still have to overwork because of others who don't turn up for work, the loss of morale and stress it causes, makes them change jobs for better working conditions and opportunities. According to the National Restaurant Association, the annual restaurant turnover rate was around 75% in 2018. Regular turnovers cost the restaurant as time, energy and money have to go into training the new staff, and salaries need to be increased when hiring to attract more candidates.

Ensuring that absenteeism is reduced can help decrease the turnover rate of employees. The dedicated employees and efficient managers will be doing their work to the best of their capabilities, thus increasing the overall productivity. This will help reduce the costs, time and resources required that come with training new staff.

Chapter Four

CHALLENGES OF MANAGING ABSENCES





It is the manager's duty to set a schedule that works for everyone and ensures all laws are adhered to. He or she also has to ensure any blank spaces within the schedule caused by absenteeism or planned leaves are filled up to ensure the work remains running smoothly. To ensure problems like absenteeism don't occur, the manager and the management team have to come up with rules, guidelines, and an encouraging system that ensures employees remain dedicated and don't take undue leaves. Incentivizing for not opting for absenteeism helps, and when you do have to ask another to fill in for a shift, the incentive helps them not feel too bad about it.

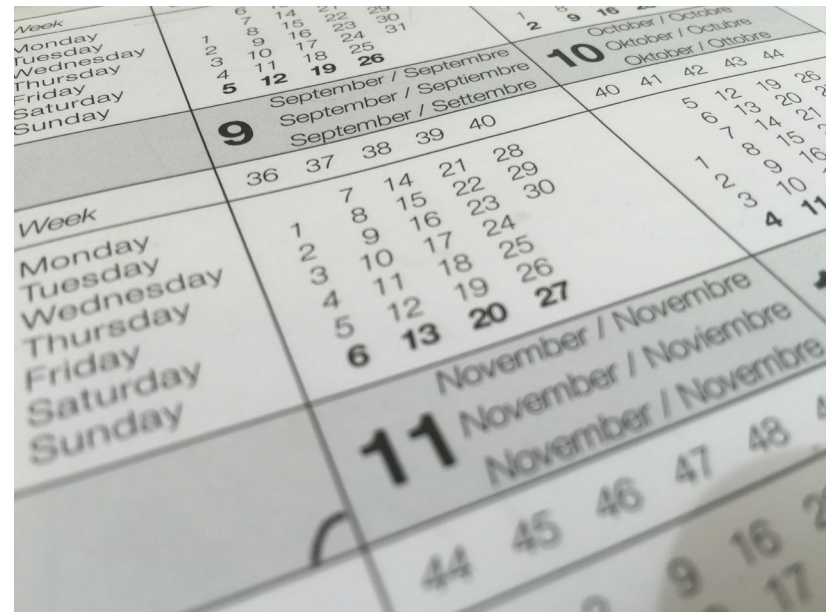
One way to get employees to not opt for absenteeism is by keeping a disciplinary system in place. A clear system that all employees know of beforehand will help them understand where the management stands on the topic. A good manager will talk to the absentee employee about the reason behind the unplanned leave. The manager will also need to remind the employee of the importance of having good attendance and the dos and don'ts followed by the restaurant. If it is a one-off case, then the conversation can

be left at that. But those who regularly practice absenteeism, need to be spoken to with a firmer hand. A pre-decided number of warnings need to be given, and if the behavior continues, then the employee in question needs to be let go. All this has to be done in a professional way that ensures the employees don't feel victimized and understand where the manager is coming from. Having a good rapport between the manager and the employees, and keeping the communication lines between them open, will help in reducing and even ending the absentee behavior.

Another way to reduce absenteeism is to have a reward program in place. A reward for an employee with the highest attendance, or an award for the one with the most productivity, will boost the morale of the employees. For the winner, it will encourage him or her to continue to do good, and for others, it will have an aspirational value as they will want to achieve the same milestones. The rewards could be something as simple as free meals during shifts, a gift card to certain shops or brands, or even a cash bonus beyond their paycheck.

Reducing Absentee Rates

Knowing the absentee rates will help understand where the system is lacking or what needs to be done differently. An absentee rate is calculated by dividing the number of absences by the total number of working days of the employee. Multiply this number by a hundred to get the absentee rate. Calculating and recording this regularly will help managers understand details like overtime labor costs, performance, etc. Once absentee rates are known, the managers can plan schedules and work according to who and what's available. Keeping this record will help them with absenteeism checks and also with the payroll. An easy way to do this is to use an automated app that does the record-keeping of absences and other such HR activities. This helps reduce the time and energy required by the managers to set everything up in the right way.



Structured Leaves

If there are set number of leave made available for the employees throughout the year then it is easier for them to be able to take leave without worry, and absenteeism reduces. Keeping a certain number of days as sick leave which is a paid day, gives the employees opportunity to be able to take those instead of not informing about it and staying absent. Absenteeism would not get them paid for that day, but using one of these days will have them paid; this will ensure they are more responsible about when and how they take leaves. Paid leaves work as bonuses that help boost morale and employee happiness.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) is among the biggest supporters of ensuring paid sick leaves are offered to employees. CDS points out a study by Environmental Health Specialists Network which notes the importance of ensuring sick employees get paid sick


leaves. Sick employees coming into work increases the chances of spreading the disease to others – staff and customers. If they don't have the option of paid sick leaves, many employees come to work despite illness as they're dependent on the pay they get for each day they work. It is not only a concern for the employee who is sick but also for the others around as they are exposed to the illness too. Customers too might get affected, and overall health concerns are high. The study found that 1 in 5 food industry workers had worked despite being sick (because of vomiting or diarrhea) for at least one shift, for social, financial, and personal reasons.

Managers, and business owners, need to be proactive and understanding in such cases. Managers need to come up with workable schedules which work for all employees and have contingency plans if someone is unwell and needs a sick leave.

Chapter Five

THE SOLUTION TO ABSENTEEISM





Absenteeism can be avoided by having workable solutions that ensure employees don't feel like they have to take unplanned leaves. Open communication between management and staff is one important way. Having structured guidelines for paid leaves, reward system, incentive system, and disciplinary system. Ensuring a proper schedule where no employee is overworked is another important aspect that can help employees not choose absenteeism. One easy way to do this is to use a scheduling app or website that helps managers keep track of all the schedules – new and old – and ensure the right schedule is made depending on seasonality, demand, and also need of the hour. With these scheduling systems being available anywhere – on mobiles, desktops, tablets, etc. – it is easy to ensure all the employees, managers, and business owners are on the same page. Leaves can be timely approved.

Schedules can be made using the available employees. Keeping all data of each employee in one system makes it easy to keep records of past actions like past absenteeism, being late to work, signing out early without reason, etc. Such scheduling systems also ensure the business keeps track of all the laws of work timings and doesn't run afoul.

Such systems ensure that the employees know when they need to work, and this reduces any excuses they might have otherwise. Manual schedules are tedious to make and also don't have all data available when being made as it is all paper-based and human errors can occur. But, with an app or a website, these human errors are avoided, while having all data in place. These apps and software help overcome business risks like low productivity, absenteeism, and low employee morale.

Conclusion

Absenteeism is not something that can be taken lightly. It costs the business money and affects productivity and the overall work environment. Managers who ensure that the staff is happy and satisfied with their work environment, have a way to ensure that employees don't remain absent for no good reason. Having positive reinforcement in place for dedicated staff, and a fair policy on sick leaves, absenteeism, etc. will help the business. Managers who use proper tools – like a scheduling app or website – can ensure that the business operations run smoothly, with good communication between them and their staff, and compiled data that can be accessed easily. While absenteeism might not be able to be completely eradicated, reducing it is easily done if the managers, business owners, and employees work together. Using three important steps – communicate, encourage and incentivize – absenteeism can be lowered.

