

## Making the first move

Making the first move in managing sickness absence could be one of the best things you can do to save money for your business in the downturn. A little recognised tactic that save more £££s than swapping energy suppliers could be the key to more efficient and productive workers.

I am continually reminded by this when i see employees for businesses, and for some reason the employee has now been off work for over six months. Did you now that anyone who has been off work over sixth months has a less than 50% chance of getting back to work? Because of the complications that set in when a person has been left languishing with daytime TV and feeling forgotten it becomes harder and harder with every passing day - their physical and mental state deteriorate and although they might have been able to cope at work with a mild health problem the realites of that are fading fast.

So - MAKE THE FIRST MOVE today.

Make it your policy to keep in touch with every employee who goes off sick as soon as you receive a sick note. Most company policies expect the employee to phone in sick, and then leave it at that, asking when they may be returning with a hopeful tone in the voice. There needs to more than that.

You need to actively manage the absence to get them back as soon as possible.

Call the employee, ask what the problem is, and what the doctor has said. Now, ask what you as a business could do to help that person get back to work more quickly. In this climate not many people want to be off work any longer than necessary and will work with you. The longer someone is off the more they and you develop suspicions and opinions about whether they should or could come back to work. This is no good for anyone, including the business' bottom line.

Consider what the person's job is and what it needs them to be able to do. Are there elements of the job they could do if you modified it temporarily? Could the person get that inspection done that is way overdue, or send them on their training updates.

People who are at work, doing some modified work are actually likely to get better quicker than those sat waiting at home for 100% recovery (which may never come so there is little point waiting for it in most cases,)

To illustrate the importance of this - a few figures (approximate)

Full time worker on the minium wage costs £230 per week in wages, £25 per week in NI.

£920 a month in wages, £100 per month in NI = £1000 per month for the "cheapest" employee

I recently I saw an HGV driver who had been off work for 11 weeks, who could have been back at work in less than 4 weeks on modified duties if the right advice had been sought earlier.

His absence for just 11 weeks had cost in excess of £3000, and he is on much more than the minimum wage as a driver.

Fact: Absence costs on average £666 (CIPD 2008) per week

Over £2500 per month per employee

Thats driect costs only - not accounting for lost productivity and cover from other employees etc.

Every day counts for the profit margins and for the person's long term health.