

Supervisor and Employee Conversations Concerning Employee Absence from Work

Supervisors and HR Representatives sometimes struggle with how to approach an employee who has been absent from work, to communicate information about FMLA and leave benefits and to obtain needed information in proper designation of leave accruals and FMLA coverage. The conversation strategies below may be of assistance in these situations.

Scenario One: When Employee Calls You Directly

Employee calls in and tells the supervisor he/she will be absent the next several days.

Objective:

Seek information to determine if FMLA may apply.
Seek to maintain direct communication with employee.

Conversation Strategy:

Hello, I am sorry that you are not feeling well. We will miss you at work during these days. What work concerns do you have during your absence? What needs to be addressed by others while you are away from work? A need of several days of absence sounds like it could be serious. How do you think your doctor might be able to help? Let's continue this communication so that I can provide you with the best support possible and help you return to work as early as you can. Please call *me/designee* tomorrow and talk with *me/designee* personally about how you are feeling and if you see your doctor, what he or she thinks we can do here at work to have you return as soon as you feel able. Also please find out from your doctor how long you need to recover so that you and I can plan concerning your recovery and management of work needs.

Scenario Two: Calling Employee During Absence

Employee calls in and leaves a message each day for two days.

Objective:

Seek to improve communication with employee.

Conversation Strategy:

Thanks for calling in. I appreciate your voice messages; however, they do not allow us to have direct communication and I believe it is important that we talk directly about how you are. Direct communication also lets me tell you that we miss you at work. And, it lets us talk about work needs when you are absent. What work concerns do you have during your absence today? How can we help you with those concerns? Are you thinking you will return to work tomorrow? If you believe you cannot return to work tomorrow, what work needs are you aware of that we can help manage or cover? Since tomorrow would be the third day of absence how might your doctor help with your recovery? Please call *me/designee* tomorrow and talk with *me/designee* personally about how you are feeling and ways that we can support an earlier return to work for you.

Scenario Three: Employee Does Not Call in the Second Day of Absence. Employee calls in yesterday and leaves a voice message s/he will be out for the day, no message is received today, the second day of absence.

Objective:

Seek information of cause of employee action of not communicating and address necessary steps to correct the problem causing the employee to not communicate with you. Seek information on return to work.

Conversation Strategy:

Hello, I did not hear from you today concerning today's absence and I am concerned that you did not call in to let us know your plans. What is the reason you did not call in today? We miss you and need you at work. Can you expect to be at work tomorrow? If not: An absence of several days sounds like it could be serious. What work concerns do you have during your absence? What needs to be addressed by others today while you are away from work? As I mentioned, we need you at work. Do you expect to be recovered to return to work tomorrow? I look forward to seeing you tomorrow. Tomorrow morning, if you find that you are not feeling well enough to return work, I want you to call *me/designee* personally so that I can learn how to manage your work during your absence and learn about your plans to help your recovery. For example, possibly you should talk with a doctor. Again, I look forward to seeing you tomorrow, but if you are not recovered to the level that you can come to work; call me directly.

Scenario Four: Concern that employee may misinterpret receiving a call at home. HR Representative's recommendation to a Supervisor who believes the employee may feel harassed by receiving a call during the work absence.

Objective:

Supervisor to use a communication strategy to address an employee's potential concern for being called at home about today's absence.

Communication Strategy Tool:

HR Representative share with Supervisor the following talking points for use in conversation with employee at time of new hire orientation, follow up education sessions and during the absence.

- When employees are absent from work for unplanned absences, it is the practice of the unit for *me/designee*, at the time of call-in, later in the day or on the second day to contact employees at home to:
 - discuss work planned for the day and how to address the work during the absence,
 - share concern for the employee and his/her health status, and
 - share interest in his/her rapid recovery, for employee's sake (no one likes to be ill).
- Share unit philosophy of employee value.
- Share employee's value to the unit and presence is missed.
- Share interest in rapid recovery and return to work when employee is ill.
- Set follow communication arrangement.
- Move into applicable scenarios above.