



Making Time Off Easy

When employees are denied requests for time off, it can drive absenteeism. People stop asking for vacation days when they know it is likely they will be denied and may in call in sick instead. The problem is that unplanned sick calls have greater impact on departments than prescheduled time off. Below are some strategies your team can try to avoid excessive calls for sick leave.



CREATE A TRADE LIST

- » Ask everyone in the department to put their name, phone number and email address on a list.
- » Distribute the list to all participating employees.
- » Create a trade board, private Facebook group, text group, or another platform to post shift trade requests for employees who want to participate.
- » Ask employees to use this platform to trade shifts with a coworker.
- » Employees who agree to a trade should let their manager know.
- » Employees should follow all rules and contracts in making trades.
- » Shift trade lists can be arranged to help make trading easier. For example, lists can be arranged by the number of hours people work each week, to prevent overtime issues. Staff can also be listed in order of seniority if that plays a role in what contracts allow.

- » Teams may combine lists with other departments if trades are allowed across departments. This can be especially useful in hospitals, where employees are staffed by arena.
- » Assign a list keeper who updates the list as needed.
- » If someone's name is not on the trade list, that person is asking for privacy and is unavailable for trade requests.



REVIEW THE VACATION POLICY

- » Make sure everyone understands the departmental and contractual rules around vacation time, and why those rules exist. Do the rules make sense for your department? If policies are out of date, consider updating them.

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CREATE A VACATION CALENDAR

- » Create a team calendar that shows when employees will be away on vacation.
- » This helps employees avoid conflicts and maximize the chances their requests will be approved.
- » The vacation calendar can include other departments if employees cover for one another across departments.



SCHEDULE TIME OFF ON DAYS OFF

- » Schedule appointments, errands and events on days off. Employees should work with supervisors to see if a different schedule might accommodate their needs.
- » The goal is to reduce short-notice ill calls. If changing someone's schedule won't negatively affect patient care, but will reduce the number of times an employee calls in sick, then it is a good trade off.



SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER

- » Some high performing teams encourage staff to trade amongst themselves when possible. If one cannot find a trading partner, the supervisor asks the whole team if they can cover for the employee with the emergency need for time off. The time off is granted only if there is team consensus.
- » Discuss with the team if people can take a few hours off while the rest of the team picks up the slack. This could prevent someone from having to call in sick for an entire shift.



DAY CARE NEEDS

- » Many employees have children, and must plan for situations when a child is sick and cannot attend school or daycare.
- » Encourage staff to share information on daycare providers, so parents might find alternate care for a child.
- » Help your team plan ahead by posting a list of all upcoming no-school days.



ON-CALL STAFF

- » Is it possible to utilize on-call staff to cover for people on vacation? It is easier for supervisors to approve vacation requests when they know those shifts will be covered.



DON'T CALL IN ILL IF YOU'RE NOT ILL

- » Teams that experience high absenteeism may have more difficulty getting vacation requests approved. Managers and staffers must know that patient needs will be met, and the more uncertainty in staffing the less likely that people will get vacation time approved. Don't feed this vicious cycle. Stay home if you are ill and come to work otherwise.



PLAN A WEEK OF PRESENCE

- » Plan a week where everyone agrees to make every effort to come to work no matter what.
- » Take baseline measures of service scores and employee satisfaction before this week, and then again during the week when the unit is fully staffed.
- » If things run more smoothly, it is evidence that ill calls affect team performance.
- » If the unit still struggles to meet its goals when fully staffed, supervisors now have evidence to make a case that the team is indeed understaffed.