



HR Examiner

*Examining practical HR issues business owners
and managers encounter every day*

Waiting for Employees

November 2006

Tips for Accountability

It's time to hold your employees accountable when:

- ▶ your good employees are leaving because of the discrepancies in employee treatment
- ▶ your customers are complaining about service
- ▶ your customers are asking for certain

Show Up or Slow Up?

Earlier this month, Wal-Mart introduced a new tardiness policy for its employees that: (1) reduced the number of tardinesses allowed employees before disciplinary action would be taken and (2) centralized the reporting of tardinesses to a 1-800 number with the objective of eliminating store managers' abilities to subjectively handle employee tardiness on a case-by-case basis.



The TV news reports and articles that covered this "hot topic" were focused on shaking up the listener

employees in order to avoid others

- ▶ multiple employees are asking you for assistance with the same problem
- ▶ there are repeated errors by the same employees
- ▶ there are wide discrepancies in employee productivity or results
- ▶ you're the only person reporting to work on time
- ▶ employee absences are exceeding the time off benefits you offer
- ▶ employees have stopped asking for your assistance because they don't think you'll act
- ▶ performance reviews are not being conducted on time
- ▶ your suggestion box is

and get reactions going, which it succeeded in doing.

The responses were two-fold. One group was irate that Wal-Mart has eliminated the "hands on" management approach to reporting attendance and question why employees who have legitimate reasons for absenteeism or tardiness should be tracked or penalized. The other side is wondering: what really is the issue here? Here's a quote from a Wal-Mart employee:

"The debate is absurd. I am a Wal-mart associate and believe me the policy is not strict enough. Everyone that is complaining about it is the one's that are to lazy to get up and come to work on time, and I for one will be glad when they are gone. It only makes it harder for those of us that do come to work when we are scheduled. If you don't like the rules find you a new game and make it easier on us that do work."

Okay - beyond the grammatical errors, I'm with the employee. Let's say you are in a Wal-mart timeclock-punching, large employer, retail type of setting, and all your cashiers decided to arrive late, who would service your customers and ring up your sales? While my scenario is an exaggeration, the fact that employees would not be held accountable for regular or timely attendance concerns me. This is a cultural and professionalism issue, even more than a policy

full

- ▶ you and your managers are spending more time on employee relations issues than on operational responsibilities
- ▶ you have more new employees than tenured employees
- ▶ your rules of conduct page in your employee handbook is wearing thin....
- ▶ you're avoiding problem employees
- ▶ you're avoiding good employees
- ▶ you're avoiding the consultant

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What About Accountability in Your Organization?

The reality is we're not all Wall-marts. Some of us work in 8-to-5 cultures, where there's a mad dash for the door at 5:00. In these more "hourly" environments, monitoring attendance closely is more common and may be more necessary. But many of us work in smaller, non-retail organizations with higher-touch cultures. If you have more exempt employees than non-exempt (hourly) employees, there is likely to be more flexibility in your attendance rules since exempt employees are paid for the week of work not the hours they work.

But my real question to you is: Does your culture hold its employees accountable for attendance, showing up on time, meeting deadlines, work productivity, negative attitudes, respect in the workplace, etc.? Over the years, I've assisting many clients with

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disciplinary actions that have resulted in terminations where the coworkers' reactions are "what took management so long to act?" rather than "why are you terminating this person?" It's our responsibility as managers to act swiftly to address and eliminate small problems before they reach termination stage. But this isn't always what we do.

Frequently our quality performers know what's going on in the workplace better than we do, especially when it comes to understanding who is stretching the rules, taking advantage of circumstances, and violating policies. Our employees spend more time dealing with the ramifications of someone's failure to follow policy than we do. They are doing dual duty for the absent or slacking employee; they are the recipient of the poor attitude. And many of them have the same response as the Wal-Mart employee I quoted above, asking: "What about me?"

While we don't want to create "police states" in our organizations, it is important to define acceptable and unacceptable behavior and hold every employee accountable consistently for those standards. Before it's too late. Read the list of questions on the left column to see whether you need some assistance addressing the issue of accountability in your organization.

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About Arlene Vernon

Arlene Vernon, PHR, partners with small businesses as their Human Resource Xpert to create their HR systems and solve their HR problems.

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