

PRESENT IN BODY, BUT NOT IN MIND

Know the price of presenteeism in the workplace.



Measuring absenteeism rates may be the most common metric for employee engagement and productivity. Managers see that team members not showing up for work immediately equates to losing money, and there are far more studies on the cost of absenteeism in the workplace. However, efforts to clamp down on absenteeism may have led to a worse situation at work—rampant presenteeism.

What is Presenteeism?

Not always apparent, presenteeism's impact is harder to quantify than absence due to sick days. But it is actually more costly to a business's bottom line.

Presenteeism is when an employee is physically present at work but is functionally absent. Researchers have argued that being excessively present may be even costlier than absenteeism to employers. By being on the job but, because of illness or other medical conditions, resulting to productivity loss.

Costs that can't be seen.

Studies have shown that presenteeism and absenteeism costs employers \$180 billion and \$118 billion, respectively. The survey results confirmed that employees are showing up to work consistently sick, stressed, and overworked.

Recent research conducted by Willis Towers Watson Health & Benefits found more than half (51%) of UK workers claim their workplaces are affected by a culture of negative judgement around being absent due to sickness.

In the Philippines, only 29% of employees are fully engaged according to a study conducted by CCAP (Contact Center Association of the Philippines). Presenteeism is made more troublesome as employees navigate through traffic and use inefficient mass transit system daily.

Ailing employees are physically present in the office, but they're not working to do their best. And worse, they risk the chance of getting others sick as well.

Many claim that they are put under pressure to return to work before they are fully recovered from illness or injury, which highlights a clear challenge for business.

What causes presenteeism and what are the signs should you look out for?

While each person's medical history may significantly contribute to their current illnesses, it is obvious that company-related factors, such as the organizational plan or the working conditions and environment, contribute directly to the rate of presenteeism.

Look into your organization's culture, processes, and leadership style that can possibly contribute to an employee's stress and anxiety. This lack of understanding, combined with aggressive absence policies to prevent abuse of sick days, can unwittingly promote presenteeism.

There are no apparent signs to presenteeism. It is rather gradual, and each employee will react differently and exhibit different defense mechanisms. As symptoms develop and stressors increase, look for out signs such as unmet deadlines, drop in productivity and quality of work, frequent tardiness and forgetfulness.

Within a company, besides the generally known absenteeism rate, there are clues that can indicate that presenteeism could be on the rise, such as:

- Overall drop in productivity even though there is no drop in the number of employment contracts
- Increase in medication insurance premiums and in the proportion of medications used for psychological health
- Increase in the use of the employee assistance program
- Increase in expenses resulting from managing absences



Get to the bottom of it.

What can you do to prevent this insidious condition among your employees?

To start, management needs to look beyond absenteeism rates and develop a solid evidence-based understanding of underlying causes of stress and unhealthy workplace behavior. Conduct an audit from a range of sources, including the employees themselves.

Wellbeing needs to be a top priority, and practices must be integrated into your organization's day-to-day operations and most importantly, your workplace culture. To do this, give your associates the tools that will allow them to communicate effectively amongst themselves and with you.

It is also imperative to review procedures and revise them in order to encourage employees to take necessary time off and not fear about their job security.

Ultimately, by creating a culture of understanding and room for two-way communication, there is great potential for early interventions, increased productivity, and successful counteraction to presenteeism.

Resources:

The Price of Presenteeism www.forbes.com

Underlying Factors contributing to Absenteeism and Presenteeism www.researchgate.net

How to manage presenteeism in the workplace www.reba.global

How HR can help curb presenteeism www.shrm.org

Presenteeism records soars amidst concerns over stress and other unhealthy workplace practices www.aon.com

About LiveWell

LiveWell is a collaborative intranet tool that allows businesses to communicate their culture, digitize the corporate well-being experience, and integrate HR initiatives. A winner of the 2017 Digital Solution of the Year Award by the French Chamber of Commerce, the LiveWell platform enables organizations to drive communication, improve participation, and measure results for data-driven decisions.

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