

Managing staff during special events

Football World Cup frenzy is nearly upon us. The Olympics are only 24 months away. How do you manage your staff during this period to ensure you don't have increased absence? Indeed, have you even considered the implications to your business?

From 11 June 2010 there are matches nearly every day for a month, culminating with the final on 11 July. The times of the matches vary, some start at 16.00 and others at 20.30. Since South Africa is an hour ahead many matches will be played during the working afternoon. The Olympics in 2012 are being held in London, therefore the majority of the events are going to occur during the 'normal working day'.

This article discusses how you can manage your business and allow staff to watch matches, or stay up-to-date in other ways without suffering from unauthorised absence or a glut of sudden ailments which require the odd day off work. Consideration is also given to handling those staff that enjoy the evening matches a little too much and suffer the following day.

The ideas examined in this article equally apply to any other event which falls in work time.

Options available when a match falls in working time

1. Business as usual:

The first option is to conduct business as normal and ignore the fact that the World Cup is taking place. Burying one's head in the sand is not recommended. Staff will want to watch matches and if you don't plan ahead your business may suffer.

2. Implement the normal holiday procedure:

This mechanism is valid for allowing people time off to watch the matches. However you may have a problem in the numbers you can let take time off. Your normal policy probably allows for no more than one or two staff to be absent on holiday at any one time in any one area. This means staff who get the holiday logged in first will be allowed the time off and others will not.

Whilst a fully reasonable method, it will not deal with those staff who are in work and want to stay up to date.

3. Allow Unpaid Leave:

Where staff have used their all their holiday allocation you could allow them to take unpaid leave rather than pretend to be off sick. This may be seen as a positive step, but ultimately could come back to haunt you. How do you justify which events are covered by the unpaid leave rule? There are lots of events where staff could claim this right (it could become custom and practice). Do you allow unpaid leave for rugby, grand prix, boxing, Wimbledon; in fact any world class sporting activity?

If this route is considered appropriate then a policy will need to be developed. The policy will need to be all encompassing e.g. spelling out the maximum unpaid allocation allowed, how the system will be managed and how people apply. It may be appropriate to have this as part of the main holiday policy rather than a separate document.

Maximum staff absences per department will also need to be considered as with the standard holiday scenario.

4. Allow Shift Swap:

In an environment where this is possible it is a positive step to dealing with staff who want to watch specific games. Provided the employee finds someone prepared to swap, the work is covered and staff are happy.

5. Allow staff to bring radios into work:

This may be something that is currently allowed in all, or part of your business. There is the potential that staff will not be fully focussed if they are trying to listen to a match. Some staff will not want to listen and may find the match commentary distracting.

6. Keeping track on the internet:

Many staff use computers and may be able to link to the internet and follow the game. This is a possible means of allowing staff to follow their team's World Cup journey.

If this route is taken it is important to communicate to staff what is and is not acceptable. This should be done before the event begins. Whatever policy is decided on here it must be monitored and enforced.

Managing sickness absence

Sickness absence should be dealt with fairly for all staff. If you have a policy which includes 'back to work' meetings then ensure these are conducted as normal. If you don't conduct such meetings you need to start doing this – you will need to change your process to include this action.

Tactfully explain to staff that all absence will be monitored and particular attention will be paid to intermittent absence which occurs on match days. Don't however jump to the immediate conclusion that the absence is match related; there may a legitimate sickness absence reason. You need to find out!

If, after investigation, the absence is found to be unconnected with any form of sickness then you should follow your normal practices (which of course, you have documented and in place; if not act now to implement procedures) for dealing with unauthorised absence.

TimelessTime can help you develop your absence management policies and determine the process you want to follow within your organisation. Contact us now for a no obligation discussion.

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