



# Attendance Management Program

Human Resources  
Summer 2005

---

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Objectives of the Attendance Management Program	1
<b>Section 1. Attendance Management Roles and Responsibilities</b>	<b>2</b>
The Need for Attendance Management	2
Employee	2
Employer	3
Senior Management	3
Unions and Staff Associations	3
Supervisor	3
Human Resources / Return to Work	4
<b>Section 2. Types of Absences</b>	<b>5</b>
Non-Culpable or Innocent Absenteeism	5
Culpable Absenteeism	6
<b>Section 3. Attendance Monitoring &amp; Identifying Attendance Problems</b>	<b>7</b>
Monitoring Attendance	7
Identifying a Potential Attendance Problem	8
<b>Section 4. The Counselling Process</b>	<b>9</b>
Employee Assistance Program	9
Addressing Non-Culpable Attendance Issues	9
Counselling Process Stages	10
The Initial Interview	10
Counselling Stage 1	12
Counselling Stage 2	13
Counselling Stage 3	14
Counselling Stage 4	14
Counselling Stage 5	16
Conclusion	17
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>18</b>
Appendix 1: Employee Attendance Record	18
Appendix 2: Employee Attendance Profile	19
Appendix 3: Suggestions for Attendance Interviews	20
Appendix 4: Sample Employee Attendance Letters	23
Appendix 5: Corrective Action for Culpable Absenteeism	33
<b>References</b>	<b>34</b>

# Introduction

---

This guide has been developed to assist supervisors in managing attendance. It does not intend to diminish the provisions of the collective agreement nor does it intend that employees incapacitated due to illness or disability be influenced to work if unable to do so.

In order to provide a high level of service, Queen's depends on the contribution of its employees and their regular attendance is essential to the achievement of this goal. The University considers it important to recognize and encourage commendable attendance. It also recognizes the cost, increased disruption and burden on co-workers caused by uncontrolled absenteeism. Employees have a responsibility to fulfill the duties for which they were employed unless prevented from doing so for legitimate reasons. The University has an obligation to its employees to encourage them and assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities.

This guide is comprised of 4 sections plus the appendices. The first section provides an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the various parties involved in attendance management. The second defines the various types of absences while the third section focuses on how to identify an attendance problem. The fourth and final section outlines the counselling process to be used in assisting employees overcome their absenteeism challenges.

Those who have additional questions are encouraged to contact an employee relations representative in the Human Resources Department for assistance.

## **Objectives of the Attendance Management Program**

- To promote optimal and consistent attendance at work.
- To raise awareness of the importance of good attendance.
- To promote an atmosphere of mutual respect, fairness and concern.
- To provide a framework for responding to excessive absenteeism.
- To assist individual employees overcome difficulties which adversely affect consistent attendance and to help prevent absenteeism problems from escalating.

# Attendance Management Roles and Responsibilities

---

## The Need for Attendance Management

Employee absenteeism has a direct impact on the level of service the University provides. High levels of absenteeism leads to poorer quality of service, lost productivity and reduced morale of co-workers. Consistent management of attendance problems can have highly positive effects on the workplace. An attendance management program can:

- reduce overtime costs;
- improve planning and organization of work;
- increase employee morale;
- improve employee/employer relations;
- reduce the amount of time absorbed by attendance problems.

Attendance management is the function of many individuals, and its success is dependant upon the commitment of all participants. Outlined below are some of the key responsibilities of the various groups who will impact the success of this program.

## Employee

The employee has the responsibility to maintain a healthy lifestyle so as to be able to fulfill the responsibilities of his/her position. However, occasionally circumstances will occur whereby an employee is required to be away from the workplace. In those cases, employees have the added responsibility of reporting their absences.

### Reporting Absences

When an employee reports an absence to the supervisor, it serves two purposes: it enables the supervisor to keep accurate attendance records and, as well, it discourages unnecessary absences. It is important that the supervisor ensure that all employees are made aware of attendance policies and the reporting procedures they need to follow when they are absent from work. These include:

- notifying the appropriate supervisor or designate as soon as possible on first day of absence;
- notifying the supervisor as early as possible of the expected date of return;
- in the case of longer absences, reporting progress and expected date of return regularly;

- notifying Human Resources as early as possible if the employee's ability to attend work is attributed to a disability so that options for accommodation can be pursued.

## **Employer**

The Employer has the right to expect that its employees will attend work regularly and that they will fulfill the services they were hired to provide. The Employer has a responsibility to put in place an attendance management policy which will assist employees in their efforts to maintain regular attendance at work.

## **Senior Management**

All individuals have the responsibility and the ability to have a positive impact on attendance at the University. Senior managers need to be accountable for the attendance levels within their areas. They can act as positive role models for employees and offer support to supervisors in the consistent application of attendance management within their business units.

## **Unions and Staff Associations**

Unions and staff associations can assist their members by providing employees with good, practical advice.

## **Supervisor**

As the person who is normally in closest contact with the employee, the supervisor plays a critical role in attendance management. Aside from setting a good personal example by providing employees with a positive role model, the Supervisor's responsibilities include:

### **Communication**

- raising awareness about the importance of consistent attendance;
- communicating the department's attendance expectations to employees;
- promoting a positive work environment;
- maintaining communications with absentee employees;

### **Monitoring Attendance**

- maintaining accurate attendance records;
- monitoring and assessing attendance statistics consistently;
- determining the presence of attendance problems in a timely manner.

## **Recognizing and Encouraging Employees**

It is crucial that supervisors ensure employees are aware that their contributions to the unit are valued and that they are missed when they are away. Supervisors encourage such awareness through various actions including:

- recognizing an employee's contributions to the unit;
- commending improved attendance;
- recognizing and encouraging exemplary attendance;
- exhibiting concern for the employee's well being and demonstrating that the supervisor is glad that the employee is back to work;
- assisting employees who are experiencing personal difficulties that are affecting their attendance (e.g. ensure they are aware of the services available through the Employee Assistance Program).

Recognition, which can be formal or informal, should be provided in a consistent manner. Examples of formal recognition include "thank you" letters commending those with exemplary or improved attendance. Informal mechanisms include consistent, positive comments which convey the supervisor's appreciation for the employee's commitment to the unit. Remarks such as "nice work" or "glad you're back", when provided consistently, demonstrate the genuine regard the supervisor places on staff contributions. Performance evaluation meetings and staff meetings also provide opportunities for the supervisor to recognize employees.

Sample letters commending exemplary or improved attendance are included in *Appendix 4*.

## **Employee Orientation**

It is important that the newly hired employee receive a departmental orientation. Part of the orientation session should be devoted to discussing attendance expectations including the proper procedures for reporting absences.

## **Human Resources / Return-to-Work Unit**

Human Resources and those individuals dedicated to Return-to-Work play a significant role in attendance management. The services of the unit, which are available to supervisors and employees, include features such as the development of return-to-work and accommodation plans. As well, employee relations representatives are available to provide administrators with support and guidance in the various stages of the attendance management process.

Supervisors can also receive advice and assistance from human resources representatives on other attendance-related issues such as interpretation of the sick leave policy, absences due to workplace injuries or long-term disability claims arising from lengthy continuous absences.

# Types of Absences

---

Absences that will require some type of Employer intervention are split into two distinct categories; Non-Culpable and Culpable. It is essential that we differentiate between these two types of absence, record them separately and resolve them differently. For instance, disciplinary measures may only be used to address absences that are determined to be culpable. Counselling measures are used to address non-culpable absences and are designed to be constructive and assist employees reduce their level of absenteeism.

## Non-Culpable or Innocent Absenteeism

Situations where an employee is away from work too frequently and yet has genuine and documented reasons for the absences are presumed to be innocent. Although the employee may be capable of doing the job when at work, the excessive absences create problems for the department. As a result, the employee is not fulfilling the requirements of the employment contract. It is important to note that innocent absenteeism is not corrected in a disciplinary fashion but rather through education and assistance.

Examples of innocent absences may include:

- excessive sick leave, with or without pay (even though there is medical certification);
- excessive outside appointments during working hours;
- excessive absences from work to deal with ongoing family problems.

There are additional types of innocent absences that require special attention since they are more difficult to categorize or raise other considerations. Two of these are identified below.

**Disability Absenteeism** is a category used to define absences that result from an identified condition of disability. These absences are considered to be innocent. Supervisors should consult with a human resources representative on these situations to address opportunities for accommodation. Departments are required to accommodate employees with a disability, within the meaning of the legislation, to the point of “undue hardship”. This type of absenteeism may also require special, personalized attendance goals which may be below the norm as part of the employment accommodation.

**Pattern Absenteeism** refers to absences that occur on particular days of the week or adjacent to scheduled days off, week-ends etc. and therefore appear on the surface to be suspicious. Pattern absenteeism is presumed to be “innocent absenteeism” unless there is evidence to the contrary since there is the possibility of a legitimate explanation for the absence. However, if after investigating the situation, it can be confirmed that the absenteeism pattern indicates abuse (i.e.

no reasonable explanation is given for the absences and it is not substantiated by medical documentation) the absences may be considered culpable and disciplinary action may be required.

## **Culpable Absenteeism**

These are unauthorized absences which are within the employee's control and may warrant a disciplinary response. The following are situations of culpable absence:

- excessive lateness;
- false explanation for an absence;
- no reason is provided for the absence;
- unsubstantiated absence, where evidence of the reason is required;
- the reason for the absence is not legitimate.

Paid culpable absences such as these may result in disciplinary action. These should be handled as described in Appendix 5 entitled *Corrective Action for Culpable Absenteeism*.

Supervisors have a right to expect regular attendance by employees. However, it is important to recognize that most absences are legitimate. Nevertheless, any absence is potentially disruptive for a department and supervisors should be concerned about every instance of absence. Furthermore, excessive absence is a strong indication that a problem may exist. The way in which a supervisor deals with employee absences will play a critical role in effective attendance management and the prevention of attendance problems from escalating.

# Attendance Monitoring and Identifying Attendance Problems

---

A limited amount of employee absence is expected. This is a normal part of the employee/employer relationship. However, when an employee's absences from work exceed the norm, an attendance problem may exist that requires intervention.

## Monitoring Attendance

### Recording Absences

Identifying attendance problems begins with monitoring the attendance of all employees periodically and in a consistent manner. Promoting and maintaining regular attendance and assisting employees overcome difficulties which reduce consistent attendance is dependent on early identification of attendance problems. In this regard, it is essential that supervisors keep up-to-date records of employee leave, as well as, monitor attendance regularly. Appendix 1 includes a sample attendance record which can be used to document the various types of employee absences. Appendix 2 is an attendance profile which can be used to help supervisors note important information about absences (i.e. provided doctor's note etc.)

### Absences Excluded from Innocent Absenteeism Statistics

Supervisors need to keep in mind that certain absences are excluded from statistics used to calculate absenteeism rates for the purposes of attendance management. These absences still need to be recorded; however, they should not be included when calculating an employee's absenteeism. These include:

- Authorized Vacation
- Banked Overtime Leave
- Bereavement Leave
- Witness/Jury Duty
- Pregnancy Leave
- Parental Leave
- Family Medical Leave (as defined by ESA)
- Emergency Leave (as defined by ESA)
- Suspension
- Approved Union Business

### Remove Culpable Absences

We must also ensure that those absences which are identified as **culpable** (see Culpable Absenteeism on page 6) form part of the attendance record; although they are not included when

calculating an employee's innocent absenteeism rate. It is important that culpable absences are dealt with in accordance with the principles of progressive discipline. The process for the management of culpable absenteeism is outlined in Appendix 5.

### **Review Remaining Absences**

After removing the above-noted absences the total remaining absences/year is compared against the University average. The Human Resources department maintains statistics on the University average absenteeism rate. This is based on departmental data provided to Human Resources via departmental *Support Staff Leave Reports*. The University average absenteeism rate is approximately 6 days/year. For detailed information on University attendance statistics, please contact the Employee Relations Unit in Human Resources.

## **Identifying a Potential Attendance Problem**

**When an employee's absenteeism record exceeds the University average this signals that there is a potential attendance issue that requires management.** At this point the supervisor needs to review all available information to determine the appropriate course of action. It is important to recognize that each employee and situation is different and that each case must be assessed independently with some consideration and flexibility given to the particular circumstances. Therefore, once we have identified that there is a potential attendance issue, we must consider all available information including the following before deciding how to best intervene.

**Number of incidents of absence** and **length of absence** are important in determining the approach that should be taken in handling attendance issues. For example, one (1) incident of twenty (20) days absence due to a bona fide illness is handled differently than twenty (20) separate incidences of one (1) day each. All absences have an adverse impact on a department; however, a single, lengthy episode will not usually be categorized as problem absenteeism where an employee's previous attendance record has been good and is expected to return to acceptable levels after the current absence issue is resolved. You will need to assess whether it was an isolated illness or injury which has caused a spike in an otherwise acceptable attendance record.

It should be noted that an employee's absences from work does not necessarily constitute problem absenteeism simply because they have an above average number of absences. It is the supervisor's responsibility to review the available information and assess whether an absenteeism problem exists.

# The Counselling Process

---

This section of the guide provides an outline that is aimed at assisting the supervisor in addressing situations where an actual or potential attendance problem has been identified. This part of the supervisory role will include acting to ensure that the employee is aware of the resources available to assist them with their individual problem.

## Employee Assistance Program

Personal problems can affect the physical and emotional well-being of an employee. The supervisor should be vigilant as to indications that employees are experiencing personal problems, particularly when these appear to be affecting their attendance or performance. In such situations, the supervisor should ensure that the employee is aware of the various services available to assist employees. They should make every effort, for instance, to remind the employee of the Employee Assistance Program, a no-cost confidential service. The EAP counselling service toll free number is 1-800-387-4765 (français 1-800-361-5676). However, supervisors should note that the EAP service is voluntary and therefore a supervisor cannot force an employee to seek help from the EAP.

## Addressing Non-Culpable Attendance Issues

In instances where an attendance concern has been identified, the supervisor will need to meet formally with the employee to address the attendance issue. Many attendance issues are resolved during the initial-interview phase and, in such cases, the supervisor continues to encourage the employee and provides on-going monitoring and feedback. In other cases, the employee shows no improvement and absences continue to be excessive. A series of subsequent meetings may be required in these situations in order to facilitate a solution to the attendance problem.

What follows is an outline of procedures for supervisors dealing with non-culpable (innocent) attendance issues. It is important to note that:

- these guidelines should be administered with flexibility and discretion in order to allow the supervisor to deal effectively with the numerous types of attendance issues that may arise. For instance, in some situations it may be advisable to repeat one or more of the stages;
- the sample letters provided in *Appendix 4* are offered as guides to assist the supervisor in letter preparation and, as such, may require editing to be suitable for a specific situation;

- supervisors should be aware that unionized employees have the right to union representation at meetings, if requested by the employee;
- supervisors should be cautious when dealing with disability absences (refer to page 5 for definition). The supervisor will need to consider whether accommodation is the appropriate response. Supervisors should contact Human Resources for assistance when dealing with such absences;
- Employee relations representatives are available to provide assistance and advice throughout the process.

## Counselling Process Stages

There are five stages in the counselling process in addition to the initial interview, which are designed to raise awareness about an employee's attendance problem and to encourage improvement. The objective is that through the encouragement and support of the supervisor and the use of the available resources, the employee can be successful in achieving and maintaining an acceptable level of attendance.

There are a number of points which are common to each stage:

- Any stage of the process can be extended, repeated or suspended all together if circumstances warrant, such as sufficient attendance improvements are noted.
- If the acceptable attendance record is not maintained for a 12 month period then the employee will repeat the last stage they had attained or progress to the next stage.
- If the attendance record continues to improve and achieves and maintains an acceptable level for a period of 12 months, then the attendance problem is considered resolved. The employee is commended on their success and is removed from the program.
- If the employee, after having been removed from the program, is required to re-enter the program, the process re-starts at the initial interview.
- **If the employee indicates at any step that there is a medical condition or disability contributing to their attendance challenges then the supervisor should discuss the situation with Human Resources so that appropriate steps can be taken.**

Below you will find each of the counselling stages explained and the process by which an employee progresses through the stages.

## The Initial Interview

Once the supervisor identifies a situation of excessive absence, the supervisor needs to arrange to meet with the employee in order to ensure the employee is aware of the concern and discuss ways to improve the situation. The interview should focus on discussing the attendance concern only, not other issues. The supervisor explains that the interview has been scheduled because a review of the employee's attendance profile has raised some concerns. As well, the supervisor

points out that when the employee is away there is an impact on the department. This impact, depending on the particular circumstances, **may** include:

- increased work load for others (which influences staff morale);
- decreased quality of service;
- unmet deadlines;
- overtime.

It is important during this first meeting for the supervisor to review the University's policy on absenteeism with the employee. When the supervisor takes a professional and positive approach to the interview and communicates with tact and sincerity, the employee is encouraged to view the meeting as a sincere attempt to resolve the attendance issue. It is important that the employee be engaged in determining the solution. In situations where it seems appropriate, the supervisor can offer assistance by describing services that may help such as, the Employee Assistance Program (see page 9).

As well, it should be noted that the counselling process for innocent absenteeism is not a disciplinary measure, as these attendance issues are considered to be innocent, unless there is evidence to the contrary. Furthermore, supervisors should be aware that, if requested, unionized employees have the right to union representation at any of the counselling meetings.

The interview concludes with a mutual plan. This will include:

- outlining the problem and the plan for correcting it;
- describing future goals; expectations and timeframe for improvement (recommended as 3 months);
- monitoring employee attendance during the defined timeframe.

The initial interview is considered an informal meeting to raise awareness about the attendance problem. As a result no formal letter is issued unless the employee progresses to counselling stage 1 after the initial monitoring period. It is important for the supervisor to ensure that the employee feels future discussions are welcomed and that the door is open if difficulties arise.

*Note: If at any point during the discussions, the employee communicates that the attendance difficulties are the direct result of an identified illness or disability, the supervisor needs to involve a human resources representative to discuss whether accommodation is appropriate.*

### **Progress Assessment:**

The employee's absenteeism record is monitored over the 3 months following the initial interview. The employee's progress will dictate the next course of action.

If the employee's attendance improves:

- a) then acknowledge the improvement by congratulating the employee

- b) inform the employee that their attendance will continue to be monitored periodically and that the initial improvement is encouraging;
- c) if the employee maintains one year of satisfactory attendance, congratulate the employee in writing and revert to standard attendance monitoring used for all employees (i.e. on a yearly basis) (congratulatory letter, *Appendix 4*);
- d) if the employee's absenteeism record deteriorates before they have attained one year of satisfactory attendance, the supervisor can repeat this stage of the process, or proceed to the next stage, depending upon the circumstances.

If there is no consistent attendance improvement:

- a) proceed to Counselling Stage 1.

## **Counselling Stage 1**

At the first stage the supervisor will:

- meet with the employee to review the attendance record following the monitoring period;
- re-emphasize the attendance expectations;
- offer to assist the employee in identifying other resources which may be of benefit, such as the E.A.P.;
- communicate to the employee that their attendance will continue to be monitored;
- confirm the attendance issues and expectations for improvement in writing (stage 1 concern letter, *Appendix 4*).

*Note: If at any point during the discussions, the employee communicates that the attendance difficulties are the direct result of an identified illness or disability, the supervisor needs to involve a human resources representative to discuss whether accommodation is appropriate.*

### **Progress Assessment:**

The employee's absenteeism record is monitored over the 3 months following the Stage 1 meeting. The employee's progress will dictate the next course of action.

If the employee's attendance improves:

- a) acknowledge the improvement with a congratulatory letter to the employee (Improvement letter format, *Appendix 4*);
- b) continue to monitor the attendance record every three months;
- c) if the employee maintains one year of satisfactory attendance, congratulate the employee and remove the employee from the program (1-year sustained improvement letter, *Appendix 4*);
- d) if the employee's absenteeism record deteriorates before they have attained one year of satisfactory attendance, the supervisor can repeat this stage of the process, or proceed to the next stage, depending upon the circumstances.

If there is no consistent attendance improvement:

- a) proceed to Counselling Stage 2.

## **Counselling Stage 2**

In certain cases, there may be no sustained improvement after two interventions by the supervisor. In these instances, the supervisor will:

- meet with the employee to review the attendance record, re-emphasize the attendance expectations, and recommend other resources;
- suggest that the employee seek a medical assessment and encourage discussion about other ways to improve attendance;
- advise the employee that there is a continuing concern regarding attendance, and emphasize that improvement is required during the next three-month review period (stage 2 concern letter, *Appendix 4*);
- confirm the attendance issues and expectations for improvement in writing.

*Note: If at any point during the discussions, the employee communicates that the attendance difficulties are the direct result of an identified illness or disability, the supervisor needs to involve a human resources representative to discuss whether accommodation is appropriate.*

### **Progress Assessment:**

The employee's absenteeism record is monitored over the 3 months following the Stage 2 meeting. The employee's progress will dictate the next course of action.

If the employee's attendance improves:

- a) acknowledge the improvement with a congratulatory letter to the employee (improvement letter, *Appendix 4*);
- b) continue to monitor the attendance record every three months;
- c) if the employee maintains one year of satisfactory attendance, congratulate the employee and remove the employee from the program (1 year sustained improvement letter, *Appendix 4*);
- d) if the employee's absenteeism record deteriorates before they have attained one year of satisfactory attendance, the supervisor can repeat this stage of the process, or proceed to the next stage, depending upon the circumstances.

If there is no consistent attendance improvement:

- a) proceed to Counselling Stage 3.

## Counselling Stage 3

At this stage the supervisor will:

- meet with the employee to once again review the attendance record and the attendance expectations;
- recommend the employee seek out other resources to assist the employee in addressing the attendance difficulties;
- advise the employee that if there is no improvement in the next three-month period, the employer will be required to take further action (stage 3 concern letter, *Appendix 4*);
- confirm the attendance issues and expectations for improvement in writing.

*Note: If at any point during the discussions, the employee communicates that the attendance difficulties are the direct result of an identified illness or disability, the supervisor needs to involve a human resources representative to discuss whether accommodation is appropriate.*

### **Progress Assessment:**

The employee's absenteeism record is monitored over the 3 months following the Stage 3 meeting. The employee's progress will dictate the next course of action.

If the employee's attendance improves:

- a) acknowledge the improvement with a congratulatory letter to the employee (improvement letter, *Appendix 4*);
- b) continue to monitor the attendance record every three months;
- c) if the employee maintains one year of satisfactory attendance, congratulate the employee and remove the employee from the program (1-year sustained improvement letter, *Appendix 4*);
- d) if the employee's absenteeism record deteriorates before they have attained one year of satisfactory attendance, the supervisor can repeat this stage of the process, or proceed to the next stage, depending upon the circumstances.

If there is no consistent attendance improvement:

- a) proceed to Counselling Stage 4.

## Counselling Stage 4

If there is no improvement in the 3 month period following the stage 3 meeting, the process includes two meetings with the employee.

At the preliminary meeting the manager/supervisor will:

- ensure that unionized employees bring along a union representative to the meeting;
- advise the employee of the seriousness of the attendance concerns;

- review the employees past attendance record and the reasons why the employee has reached this stage;
- ask the employee to seek a medical assessment to determine their capability of maintaining regular attendance at work;
- provide the employee with a letter to take to their doctor;
- emphasize that the medical information must be submitted in a sealed envelope to the accommodation specialist in Human Resources;
- inform the employee that they will be required to attend a follow-up meeting to discuss the outcome of the medical assessment;
- warn the employee that if the required medical information is not provided or it indicates that regular and consistent attendance cannot be expected and there is no disability identified, then termination will be considered;
- advise the employee to bring a union representative to the follow-up meeting (if the employee is unionized);
- confirm the attendance issues and expectations for improvement in writing (if the employee is unionized, provide a copy to the union).

**If the employee refuses to provide the required medical information or the information indicates that regular and consistent attendance cannot be expected:**

- a) the supervisor, manager, and employee relations representative meet to review the case and determine the appropriate course of action;
- b) the follow-up meeting is held to advise the employee of the action that will be taken.

**If the employee provides medical information indicating that there is no medical condition which would prevent regular and consistent attendance from work the follow-up meeting proceeds as follows.**

At the follow-up meeting the manager/supervisor will:

- give the employee another opportunity and advise the employee that his/her attendance will be monitored over the next 3 months;
- advise the employee that he/she has reached the final stage of the counselling process and that if the attendance expectations are not met and sustained for a period of 12 months, termination will be considered;
- document the attendance concerns and expectations for sustained improvement in a letter (Follow-up to Stage 4 meeting, *Appendix 4*);
- provide a copy of the letter to the union, if the employee is unionized)

*Note: If at any point during the discussions, the employee communicates that the attendance difficulties are the direct result of an identified illness or disability, the supervisor needs to involve a human resources representative to discuss whether accommodation is appropriate.*

### **Progress Assessment:**

The employee's absenteeism record is monitored over 3 months following the Stage 4 meeting. The employee's progress will dictate the next course of action:

If the employee's attendance improves:

- a) acknowledge the improvement with a congratulatory letter to the employee (improvement letter, *Appendix 4*);
- b) continue to monitor the attendance record every three months;
- c) if the employee maintains one year of satisfactory attendance, congratulate the employee and remove the employee from the program (1-year sustained improvement letter, *Appendix 4*);
- d) If the employee's absenteeism record deteriorates before they have attained one year of satisfactory attendance, the manager, supervisor and an employee relations representative meet to determine whether to repeat this stage of the process, or proceed to termination.

If there is no consistent attendance improvement:

- a) proceed to Counselling Stage 5.

## **Counselling Stage 5**

If the counselling provided at Stage 4 does not yield the necessary attendance results then the manager (or designate) meets with an employee relations representative to discuss termination process and assess whether any conditions exist which would suggest re-considering termination.

**Discharge** should be considered only when all the steps outlined previously have been met and when every possible action has been taken to accommodate the employee. The following would be some of the considerations in ruling on an innocent absenteeism dismissal case.

- Has the employee done everything possible to regain their health and return to work?
- Has the employer provided assistance in every way possible (i.e. counselling, support, time off.)?
- Has the employer given the employee sufficient notice that the attendance problem is jeopardizing his/her employment?
- Has the employer determined if a disability requiring accommodation exists?
- Has enough time elapsed to allow for every possible chance of recovery?
- Has the employer treated the employee in a fair and equitable manner?

These guidelines including the counselling stages outlined in the previous paragraphs are designed to help employees resolve their attendance problems. However, when it is demonstrated that the employee is not likely to be able to maintain regular attendance in the future, the employee may need to be released through non-disciplinary discharge. This decision needs to be substantiated by the following test:

- The absences have been shown to be clearly excessive.
- It has been proven that the employee will be unable to attend work on a regular basis in the future.
- All reasonable accommodations have been considered.

## **Conclusion**

It is important to note that most attendance issues are resolved early in the process. While the steps described in the latter part of this section are occasionally necessary, in the majority of cases, the situation is resolved before it is necessary to terminate employment. Through implementation of positive actions suggested earlier in this guide, such as counselling the employee and ensuring that the employee is aware of the resources available to assist with their individual situation, the supervisor will encourage and support the employee in achieving and maintaining good attendance.

# Appendix 1: Employee Attendance Record

---

Employee Name:																																				
200X ATTENDANCE RECORD																																				
Date of Hire:																																				
200X Vacation Entitlement:																																				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	Vacation	Sick	Other		
January																																				
February																																				
March																																				
April																																				
May																																				
June																																				
July																																				
August																																				
September																																				
October																																				
November																																				
December																																				
<b>TOTAL</b>																																				

**V=Vacation day**  
**S=Sick day**  
**C=Compassionate leave**  
**B=Bereavement leave**  
**O=Other**



## **Appendix 3: Suggestions for Attendance Interviews**

---

Supervisors need to be well-prepared in order to encourage a successful interview.

In order to be well-prepared, the supervisor should:

- think about what is intended to be accomplished (e.g., raise employee awareness of employer concerns, help understand the cause of the absences, identify solutions, etc.);
- review the employee's file and past attendance record, identify similar problems in the past, reasons, and action taken to resolve the problems;
- develop an appropriate approach and a number of alternatives;
- seek advice from senior managers or human resources staff on key points to address during the interview;
- set a mutually suitable time;
- allow enough time for discussion;
- organize all the facts and information well in advance of the interview;
- discuss the attendance concern, not other issues;
- plan for taking notes about the interview.

In any meeting with an employee to address an attendance issue, the interview tone and setting are extremely important to the success of the meeting. It is important that the supervisor conducts the meeting in a respectful manner and in a tone that shows genuine concern. A tactful presentation of the issue by the supervisor and a request for improvement will encourage a positive employee response and help to establish a cooperative relationship. Keep in mind that the purpose of these meetings is to raise the employee's awareness of the attendance problem, inform them that the department is concerned, identify solutions and encourage improvement.

To ensure a well-conducted interview:

### **Points to Make**

- have a copy of the employee's attendance record to review with them;
- emphasize the University's need and desire for every employee to be at work when scheduled;
- identify how the absences affect the Department (morale of fellow employees, effectiveness and productivity of work group, quality of service provided);
- stress the requirement for improvement and clearly define expectations;
- inform the employee that their attendance will continue to be monitored;
- remind the employee that the Employee Assistance Program is available to them;
- emphasize future improvement rather than the negative issues from the past;

### **Tone to Take**

- meet in a suitable location (e.g. privacy);
- ensure confidentiality;
- show respect for the individual;

- listen carefully, put the employee at ease (the purpose of the interview is to find a solution, not to discourage the employee);
- observe non-verbal communication signals and body movements;
- use a tone of voice that demonstrates concern rather than anger or discipline;
- control voice volume;
- recognize that the choice of spoken words will affect the outcome of the meeting;
- allow the employee the opportunity to comment.

Be sure to document the meeting.

Most attendance issues can be resolved if the situation is handled properly. Remember, unless there is evidence to the contrary, the supervisor always assumes that an absence situation is one of **innocent or non-culpable absenteeism and therefore, is not subject to disciplinary action.**

## **Suggested Answers to Questions Frequently Asked During Attendance Interviews**

- Q. The attendance of many others is much worse than mine. Why have I been singled out for an interview when others who have worse attendance than mine have not been talked to?
- A. This meeting has been arranged to discuss your attendance. It would not be appropriate to discuss another individual's attendance record in this meeting.
- Q. I have medical certificates for every one of the days you mentioned. Don't you realize that I was sick on each one of those days?
- A. Yes, I realize you were sick on those days and I do not believe you have been abusing the sick leave policy. If I did, I would be considering a disciplinary process.

However, I am concerned that you are unable to be at work on a regular basis and that your absences have resulted in unsatisfactory attendance. Good attendance is a requirement of your position. We are entitled to expect a reasonable level of attendance from you. Your absences create staffing problems and increase workload for other staff. I would like to be able to provide you with support or resources that would help you with this problem. If there is a medical problem, it will benefit all to ensure that you seek advice and resources to remedy the situation. If you have a medical condition that may require accommodation, I can refer you to the accommodation specialist in Human Resources.

How long will you be monitoring my attendance?

- A. I monitor all my employees' attendance on an ongoing basis. In addition, as a result of your attendance record, you will remain in the attendance management program until you maintain an acceptable attendance record for 12 continuous months.

## **Appendix 4: Sample Employee Attendance Letters**

---

### **Template A – Congratulatory Letter**

DATE

Employee Name

Department

### **CONFIDENTIAL**

Dear:

A review of your attendance record for the period X to Y indicates you recorded no sick leave absences.\*

I am writing to congratulate you for your exemplary attendance. The Department is extremely pleased with your efforts and obvious dedication to maintaining excellent attendance.

I would like to compliment you and express the University's appreciation in this regard and encourage you to maintain your on-going commitment.

Yours truly,

Supervisor

cc: Manager  
Employee Relations Unit, Human Resources

\* Letter can be modified as required where there has been some sick leave, but the absences have been well within acceptable standards.

## **Template B – Improvement Letter**

DATE

Employee Name

Department

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Dear:

I am writing to confirm our meeting held on DATE.

In that meeting we reviewed your attendance record and found that some improvements were required. You will recall that you were also advised that your attendance record would continue to be monitored closely and reviewed further in three months.

Assessment of your attendance for the period X to Y reveals you recorded (no/very few) sick leave absences during this period. I want to commend you for the effort you have made and the resulting improvement in your attendance.

While your attendance record will continue to be monitored on a regular basis, your improvement bodes well for the months to come.

Keep up the good work!

Yours truly,

Supervisor

cc:     Manager  
       Employee Relations Unit, Human Resources

## **Template C – 1 Year Sustained Improvement**

DATE

Employee Name

Department

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Dear:

I am writing to confirm our meeting held on DATE.

A review of your attendance record indicates that you drew X days of sick leave in (year), X days in (year) and X days so far in (year).

Your record for the past 12 months reveals that your attendance has improved dramatically and you have been able to minimize your absences for an extended period of time. We are very pleased and would like to recognize your efforts and congratulate you on this improvement.

Recognizing that you have met your attendance targets, no further meetings will be required as long as an acceptable attendance record is maintained.

Thank you again for your efforts and diligence in improving your attendance.

Yours truly,

Supervisor

cc:     Manager  
       Employee Relations Unit, Human Resources

## Template D - Relapse

DATE

Employee Name  
Department

### **CONFIDENTIAL**

Dear:

I am writing to confirm our meeting held on DATE.

In a letter dated X, following an initial three-month review of your attendance, I noted that your attendance record had improved and congratulated you for your efforts.

However, the Department is concerned about your frequent use of sick leave during the current review period. A review of your record for the period X to Y reveals that you have drawn an additional X days of sick leave (a copy of your most recent attendance record is attached).

While the validity of your use of sick leave is not being questioned, the efficient operation of the Department depends on good attendance. Unscheduled absences reduce the Department's ability to plan, organize and carry out its activities. Continual absences undermine employee reliability and may result in increased staffing and overtime costs.

Although you have been given an opportunity to improve your attendance, it appears that you have not maintained your initial improvement. Accordingly, your attendance record will again be monitored closely over the next three months and immediate and significant improvement is required. A meeting will be scheduled with you at that time to discuss your progress.

I would also like to take the opportunity to remind you again that if you are experiencing personal difficulties which you feel may be affecting your attendance, Queen's has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is a voluntary, confidential counselling service for University employees and their families. The EAP service can be reached at 1-800-387-4765.

Yours truly,

Supervisor

Attachment

cc: Manager  
Employee Relations Unit, Human Resources

## Template E – Stage 1 Concern

DATE

Employee Name

Department

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Dear:

I am writing to confirm our meeting held on DATE.

A review of your attendance record for the period of X to Y indicates you have relied heavily on sick leave.

Your record indicates you were absent for X days in (year), X days in (year) and X days so far this year (please see the attached copies of your attendance record.) While the validity of your use of sick leave is not being questioned and we sympathize with your apparent need for frequent use of sick leave, the Department must insist upon regular attendance. Frequent absences hinder the planning, organization and completion of work. Significant absences such as yours also place unwelcome stress on co-workers and may result in increased workload, deterioration in the quality of service and overtime costs incurred.

Your use of the sick leave over the past X years/months is above the University average of 6 days. This is unacceptable and immediate and significant improvement in your attendance is required. Your attendance record will be monitored closely and reviewed again for improvement in three months time.

The department is willing to provide you with whatever assistance it is able to, in order to maintain your attendance at an acceptable level. If you are experiencing personal difficulties, which you feel may be affecting your attendance; we recommend you contact the Queen's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP service can be reached at 1-800-387-4765.

Yours truly,

Supervisor

Attachment

cc: Manager  
Employee Relations Unit, Human Resources

## Template F - Stage 2 Concern

DATE

Employee Name

Department

### CONFIDENTIAL

Dear:

I am writing to confirm our meeting held on DATE.

In a letter dated (XXXX – *Stage 1 Concern Letter*), you were advised that your attendance record was unacceptable and that an immediate and significant improvement was required. You were further advised that your attendance would be monitored closely and reviewed in three months time.

A review of your attendance for the period X to Y reveals that you drew an additional X days of sick leave (please see the attached copy of your most recent attendance record.)

While the validity of your use of sick leave is not being questioned, as previously noted, the efficient operation of the Department depends on good attendance. Unscheduled absences reduce the Department's ability to plan, organize and carry out its activities. Continual absences undermine employee reliability and may result in increased staffing or overtime costs.

Although you have been given an opportunity to improve your attendance, significant improvement has not materialized. While we sympathize with your situation, the Department cannot accommodate ongoing absences without information to substantiate your need for accommodation. Accordingly, your attendance record will again be monitored closely over the next three months and immediate and significant improvement is required. A meeting will be scheduled with you at that time to discuss your progress.

I would also like to take the opportunity to remind you again that if you are experiencing personal difficulties which you feel may be affecting your attendance, Queen's has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is a voluntary, confidential counselling service for University employees and their families. The EAP service can be reached at 1-800-387-4765.

Yours truly,

Supervisor

Attachment

cc: Manager  
Employee Relations Unit, Human Resources

## Template G – Stage 3 Concern

DATE

Employee Name  
Department

### CONFIDENTIAL

Dear:

I am writing to confirm our meeting held on DATE.

By letters dated (Stage 1 Concern and Stage 2 Concern), you were advised your attendance was unacceptable to this Department. You were further advised that an immediate and significant improvement was required and that your attendance would be reviewed in three months time.

A review of your attendance record from X to Y reveals that you have drawn an additional X days of sick leave (please see the attached copy of your most recent attendance record.) Although you have been given a number of opportunities to improve, and despite your commitment to maintain an acceptable level of attendance following the above-noted meetings, no significant change has occurred. While we sympathize with your situation, the Department cannot accommodate ongoing absences without information to substantiate your need for accommodation.

Your attendance record indicates that you have claimed \_\_\_ sick days in (year), \_\_\_ sick days in (year), \_\_\_ sick days in (year), \_\_\_ sick days in (year) and \_\_\_ sick days so far this year. These ongoing absences place undue strain on staff and operations in general and the Department cannot permit this to continue. I must emphasize that your regular attendance at work is a requirement of your position.

I will take the opportunity to remind you again that if you are experiencing personal difficulties which you feel may be affecting your attendance, Queen's has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is a voluntary, confidential counselling service for University employees and their families. The EAP service can be reached at 1-800-387-4765.

Your attendance will again be monitored closely over the next three months. If immediate and significant improvement is not evident at the end of that period, the Department will be forced to take further action. A meeting will be scheduled with you at that time to discuss your progress.

Yours truly,

Supervisor

Attachment

cc: Manager  
Director  
Employee Relations Unit, Human Resources

## Template H – Stage 4 Concern

DATE

Employee Name  
Department

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Dear:

The Department has written and met with you on a number of occasions (X times) regarding your frequent use of sick leave. On each occasion, you have been advised that, while you have otherwise been a valued member of the University, your attendance record has been unsatisfactory. You were further told your frequent absences were having an adverse effect on the Department's ability to carry out its work, and of our expectation for immediate and significant improvement. You were also informed that your attendance would be monitored on an ongoing basis.

A review of your attendance for the period X to Y indicates you have drawn an additional \_\_\_\_ days of sick leave. Although you have been given a number of opportunities to improve over the past \_\_\_\_ years/months, your attendance continues to be substantially below acceptable levels. We view this as a gravely serious matter, which has a significant negative impact on departmental operations.

From our assessment, regular attendance would appear impossible in the future. That being the case, I must ask you to provide medical documentation indicating whether the Department can expect future regular and consistent attendance from you. I have enclosed a letter for you to take to your doctor. Please return this information in a sealed envelope to Scott Wylie in the Human Resources Department prior to "date of the meeting".

You are required to attend a meeting on (date) at \_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m. At that meeting we will discuss your ability to maintain regular attendance in the future and the expectations for your attendance. If you choose not to provide the requested medical information, as specified above, we may not have full information regarding your medical status and will be forced to rely on your attendance history to determine whether to terminate your employment. Please bring along a union representative to attend this meeting with you.

I will take the opportunity to remind you again that if you are experiencing personal difficulties which you feel may be affecting your attendance, Queen's has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is a voluntary, confidential counselling service for University employees and their families. The EAP service can be reached at 1-800-387-4765.

Yours truly,

Manager

cc: Supervisor  
Director  
Employee Relations Unit, Human Resources  
CUPE Local

## Template I – Follow-up to Stage 4 Meeting

DATE

Employee Name

Department

### CONFIDENTIAL

Dear:

On DATE, we met to discuss our expectations for your attendance in light of the information you have provided from your doctor.

By letters dated X, Y and Z, you were advised that your attendance was unacceptable to the Department. You were further advised that an immediate and significant improvement was required or the Department would be forced to take further action. On DATE, you were asked to provide medical information to determine your ability to attend at work on a regular and consistent basis.

We were advised based on the medical information provided, that you do not have a medical condition which would prevent you from performing your duties or from attending at work on a regular and consistent basis.

Your attendance record indicates that you have used \_\_\_ sick days in (year), \_\_\_ sick days in (year), \_\_\_ sick days in (year) and \_\_\_ sick days so far this year. This is well-below the University's acceptable standard and the department cannot continue to accept this level of attendance. However, we will once again give you an opportunity to meet your attendance expectations. Your attendance will continue to be closely monitored at three month intervals. If at the end of any review period within the next 12 months you have not maintained an acceptable attendance level, the Department will consider terminating your employment. We will meet with you again in three months to review your progress.

You have now been clearly advised that continued, excessive absenteeism could result in the termination of your employment. We sincerely hope that you are able to use this opportunity to demonstrate your ability to attend at work on a consistent and regular basis.

If I can offer any assistance towards this goal, please let me know I can be reached at \_\_\_\_\_. If your wish to utilize the confidential support services of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), the EAP service can be reached at 1-800-387-4765.

Yours truly,

Manager

Cc: Director  
Supervisor  
Employee Relations Unit, Human Resources  
CUPE Local

## **Template J – Termination Innocent Absenteeism**

DATE

Employee Name

Department

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Dear:

**Re: Termination of Employment**

**Note:**

This letter is only drafted as a last resort to the attendance management program, as the goal of the program is to inform employees of attendance problems and to work towards a resolution. Reaching this stage means that it has been determined that the employment relationship has broken down and there is no reasonable prospect for acceptable attendance in the foreseeable future.

Should an employee reach this stage, the supervisor and manager work closely with the Employee Relations Unit to review the employee's progress through the program and to discuss the termination process.

## **Appendix 5: Corrective Action for Culpable Absenteeism**

Some absences clearly warrant a disciplinary response. If the employee's unacceptable attendance is clearly within the employee's control (i.e. the employee chooses to be absent without permission), it is appropriate for the supervisor to respond with disciplinary measures. Instances of culpable absenteeism include situations where the employee:

- gives a false reason for the absence;
- offers no explanation for an absence;
- does not provide a doctor's certificate when required;
- is excessively late.

Such absences may be deliberate violations of the employment agreement or they may be situations of poor employee judgment. Appropriate action by the supervisor involves a response in which discipline is progressively increased for each related infraction until the behaviour is corrected or the employee has been discharged. Note, however, that in the event of a serious offense, (e.g., an absence without leave for a lengthy period), strict adherence to the progressive discipline model is inappropriate and more serious disciplinary action up to and including discharge may be warranted at the first offence. However, the nature and frequency of the offence must be taken into consideration when determining the discipline issued. Some offences will require more serious disciplinary action than others.

Progressive discipline is meant to be corrective and therefore a first offence is usually treated less seriously than subsequent offences. If after an early discipline, an employee commits a related offence within a reasonable period after the previous discipline, the process is normally moved to the next disciplinary stage. Of course, at any stage of the process a satisfactory resolution may be achieved and, in that event, the disciplinary response process will conclude.

Stages of a corrective progressive disciplinary response involve four main steps, which normally progress as follows:

- a verbal warning
- written warning
- suspension
- disciplinary discharge

The specifics of the circumstance will dictate whether it is appropriate to repeat a step rather than proceed to the next.

When an employee's absence is deemed to be culpable, the supervisor should meet with senior management and employee relations staff in Human Resources to determine the appropriate course of action.

# References

---

- Borden, Ladner, Gervais LLP, *Labour & Employment Law News*, Summer 2002
- Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, *Attendance Enhancement Programme: A Manger's Guide*, 1991
- City of Ottawa, *Handbook on Attendance Management*, 1993
- Coast Mountain Bus Company, *Attendance Policy*, 1997
- Council of the City of Toronto, *Attendance Management Program*, 2001
- County of Elgin, *Human Resources Policy Manual: Attendance Management System*, 2002
- Greater Vancouver Regional District, *Employee Attendance Support Program*, 2002
- IR Research Services, *The Canadian Attendance Management Guide*, 1991
- Labour Relations Consultants, *An Introduction to Attendance Management*, 2003
- Lancaster House, *Current Arbitration Cases Issue No. 26*, 2004
- Lancaster House, *Leading Cases*, 2004
- Staples, McDannold, Stewart, *Labour Bulletin*, 2003
- Stringer, Brisbin, Humphrey Management Lawyers, *Reports*, Summer 2004
- Toronto Public Library, *Attendance Management Program*, 2001