

Attendance Management

CCA Standard© User Groups

Since the launch of the CCA Standard© in 2001, over 100 contact centres have successfully achieved CCA accreditation. At the end of 2004, it was agreed that the knowledge and experience garnered by these accredited organisations would benefit being shared by the group and within the broader circles of CCA members. CCA has established several working groups to examine specific topics known to be of importance within contact centres, to learn how to overcome problems, and to establish how best practice can be implemented in line with the ethos of the CCA Standard© of continuous improvement.

Based on a presentation developed by Eilin DeBuitleir of Baking of Ireland 365 and Laura Harold of National Australia Group, this white paper outlines the key findings of the [Performance Management User Group](#) (click link for more info), relating to attendance management.

CCA is very grateful for the contribution of the following additional individuals and their organisations to discussions on this topic. Each of the organisations represented have demonstrated excellence in their own operations, and thus their participation in developing these guidelines is very much appreciated.

- Ian McKinnon – West Bromwich Building Society
- Frances McKean – RHL
- Theresa Wood – British Gas
- Jan Pollock – Prudential
- Gill Jones – Telereal
- Neil Shackleton – BT

Introduction

The management of attendance in the contact centre is an area of great concern to many organisations, and is an issue which has a significant impact on the productivity, motivation and culture of the centre. The following guidelines have been developed to assist organisations in ensuring that this area of activity is managed effectively.

Best Practice Guidelines

1. Setting Goals & Agreeing Approaches
2. Defining Expectations
3. Managing Attendance
4. Processes

Setting Goals & Agreeing Approaches

Tangible goals can bring clarity and direction to attendance management activities. The following considerations are recommended:

- The key goal of attendance management is reducing **short-term sickness**.
- It was agreed by the group that the **benchmarking targets** should be:
 - Short-Term Sick Leave: Under 5%
 - Overall Sick Leave: Under 7.5% (including long-term sick leave)
- **Classifications** for different types of leave should be used to ensure clarity.
- Management should agree and set **trigger points** for the organisation. These are the points at which the disciplinary process is initiated if a member of staff has exceeded an acceptable level of absence.

- When setting goals, do not underestimate the **impact of absence** on other members of staff. Activity does not lessen when there are reduced numbers of staff, and therefore those employees present will generally be required work harder.
- The same attendance management process should apply from the **top down**, with reporting including senior management. The process must be rigidly applied in all instances.
- If a **Trade Union** is evident in the centre, management should work closely with them to agree the approach.

Defining Expectations

It is important that staff are clear regarding the requirements and expectations of their employers. This can be achieved in the following ways:

- Begin at the **recruitment phase**. Stress the responsibility of the individual employee to comply with the organisational contractual requirement during the initial **recruitment and induction** phases. It is important that all employees recognise from the very beginning the requirements of the organisation in this respect.
- The absence management process and ethos must also be covered at **induction**, and the importance of attendance stressed. The impact of absence both on colleagues and on overall performance should be explained and understood by all.
- **Guidelines** should be available for the reference of all staff. Each case should be reviewed individually within these guidelines.

Managing Attendance

Successful absence management begins at the top. Managers and team leaders have the opportunity and responsibility to create an environment in which the importance of attendance is understood, and in which absence is managed responsibly. The following guidelines are designed to assist in this process:

- Management should **lead by example**, and **MUST** be confident in managing the process. This does make a difference to staff perception.
- Team managers **MUST** be **trained** in absence management, and thus attendance management should be part of the Team Leader mandatory training package. The importance of this should not be under-estimated. Organisations fail to manage effectively when first line management do not having the confidence/guidelines to apply the process consistently and fairly to all employees.
- **Senior Management** must be seen to recognise the importance of absence management and offer support to middle management as appropriate. Senior management should be involved in any discussion relating to instances of long-term sickness.
- Absence levels can be included as **Junior Management** goals to ensure a greater focus (although long-term sickness is often excluded).
- Management **MUST** take action when it is required, and use the disciplinary process.
- When difficulties arise then the onus is on management and the individual to find a **resolution**. A partnership approach should be encouraged.

- A consistency check from HR/Senior Management must be in place.

Processes

Finally, we move to the more technical points of absence management, as well as some practical suggestions:

- **Daily management meetings** should review sickness/absenteeism to increase overall focus and awareness.
- **Scripts** can be developed to ensure that a common approach/process is utilised by all to ensure consistency and fairness.
- When conducting **back to work interviews**, investigate the reasons for absence. Refer to previous instances and position the absence with previous instances. Back to Work interviews are crucial and must be documented in all instances. Interviews must be prepared in advance and guidance from a senior manager sought if appropriate.
- “Knowing your People” is crucial in attendance management. Keep a record of past performance and attendance. What **history** is there?
- Remember when people ask for **holiday** and are refused - remark on it beforehand by asking if they were able to make arrangements. By doing this it is difficult to take this as sick leave.
- Specific **home related problems** should not be included within individual sickness records. Have a means to record these separately.
- **Saturday and Sunday** may or may not be included in measuring sickness.
- Opting to take leave instead of reporting sickness absence is not permitted in some organisations.

Further Information

For further information on this topic, or for more details regarding the CCA Standard[®] User Groups, please contact Judy Smyth, CCA Best Practice Specialist, at judy.smyth@cca.org.uk