

# The Five Hidden Causes of Employee Absenteeism - and What You Can Do About Them

Presented by Rachelle Falls, HR Strategist



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# About Rachelle

- Founder of Sun Strategies, a consulting firm engaging clients and candidates across social platforms
- 15 years of industry experience, specifically HR Tech recruiting and performance management
- Host of the podcast, HRNOW on Blog Talk Radio
- Engage with Rachelle on Twitter @CorporateHRGirl

# Learning Objectives

- Five hidden causes for chronic absenteeism
- What you can do to solve the problem
- How to get employees back on track

# Hidden Reason #1: Poor Screening



# Background Screening for New Hires

- Background screens ensure you hire high-quality, responsible workers
- Use standardized job applications to capture information not found on resumes
- Be careful your applications are compliant with state and local laws

**California**  
**Application for Employment**

Equal access to programs, services and employment is available to all persons. Those applicants requiring reasonable accommodation to the application and/or interview process should notify a representative of the Human Resources Department.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Applicant ID # \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone # (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Cellular/Other Phone # (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Position(s) applied for \_\_\_\_\_ Date of application \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Referral Source (Please check the appropriate category and list the source.)  
 Walk-in  School  
 Employer  Job Fair  
 Advertisement  Staffing Agency  
 Company's Website  Government Employment Agency  
 Other Internet  Other \_\_\_\_\_

If necessary, best time to call you is \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home  Cellular/Other  
 May we contact you at work?  Yes  No  
 If yes, work number and best time to call: \_\_\_\_\_  
 If you are under 18 and it is required, can you furnish a work permit?  Yes  No  
 If no, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Have you submitted an application here before?  Yes  No  
 If yes, give date(s) and position(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been employed here before?  Yes  No  
 If yes, give dates: From \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ To \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
 Is this application a request for reemployment following an extended military leave of absence from this company?  Yes  No  
 If yes, additional information may be requested.

Are you legally eligible for employment in this country?  Yes  No  
 Date available for work \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_  
 What is your desired salary range or hourly rate of pay?  
 \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Per \_\_\_\_\_  
 Type of employment desired:  Full-Time  Part-Time  
 Educational Co-Op  Seasonal  Temporary  
 Will you relocate if job requires it?  Yes  No  
 Will you travel if job requires it?  Yes  No  
 If they have been explained to you, are you able to meet the attendance requirements of the position?  N/A  Yes  No

Will you work overtime if required?  Yes  No  
 If no, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Are you able to perform the "essential functions" of the job for which you are applying (with or without reasonable accommodation)?  
 This question is not designed to elicit information about an applicant's disability. Please do not provide information about the existence of a disability, particular accommodations, or whether accommodations are necessary. These items may be addressed at a later stage to the extent permitted by law.  
 Yes  No  Need more information about the job's "essential functions" to respond

Driver's license number required if driving may be required in the job for which you are applying: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been bonded?  Yes  No  
MRI: Answering "yes" to the following questions does not constitute an admission but to employment. Factors such as date of the offense, seriousness and nature of the violation, and rehabilitation will be taken into account. On answering these questions, do not include minor traffic infractions and convictions that have been judicially dismissed or reduced, expunged or otherwise eradicated, any conviction for which probation has been successfully completed or otherwise discharged and for which you have judicially obtained, waived or participated in any pre-trial or post-trial diversion program, and nonjudicial, informal offenses that occurred more than two years ago.

Have you ever pleaded "guilty" or "no contest" to or been convicted of a misdemeanor or felony?  Yes  No  
 If yes, please provide date(s) and details: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been arrested for any matters for which you are out on bail or on your own recognizance pending trial?  Yes  No  
 If yes, please provide date(s) and details: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you entered into an agreement with any former employer or other party (such as a noncompetition agreement) that might, in any way, restrict your ability to work for our company?  Yes  No  
 If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Tips for Interviewing

- Ask applicants questions about the negative aspects of their previous jobs
  - What didn't you like at your previous company?
  - Why did you leave your last job?
  - How would previous managers describe your work?
- These answers may reveal disengagement or poor attitudes
- Morality or ethics questions can help you spot these characteristics, too

# Contacting References

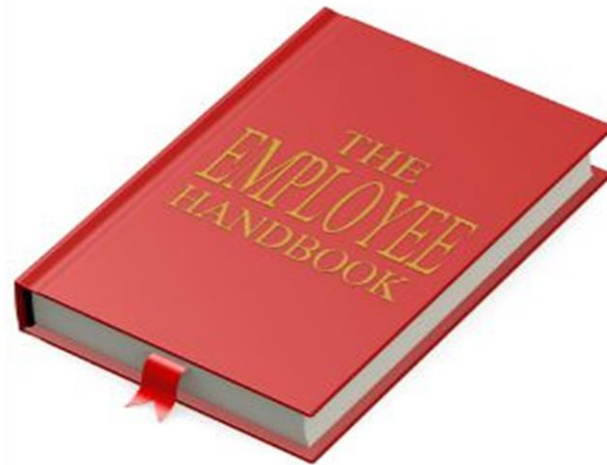
- Contacting previous employers is essential
- Call every reference until you can get at least one person to talk
- Ask candidates for additional references if no one has additional information

# Criminal History, Credit Checks and Drug Tests

- Criminal history checks: reveal an applicant's previous arrests and convictions
- Credit checks: verify previous employment and show an applicant's credit history and public record information on bankruptcies, liens and judgments
- Drug tests: drug usage *may* contribute to absenteeism
- Know the laws that apply: FCRA or local laws



# Hidden Reason #2: Unclear Policies



# Unclear Policies

- Employees may be accidentally abusing the rules without knowing it
- Create clear policies and consequences, and communicate them to employees in writing
- Attendance policy should include:
  - Typical work hours
  - Definition of “late”
  - Paid or unpaid holidays
  - Time-off policies
  - Consequences or disciplinary measures

# Restrictive Policies

- If policies are too restrictive, employees may resort to abusing system to get the time off they need
- Restrictive policies like “no-fault” or “three strikes” rules may be illegal if they interfere with FMLA rights
- Remember: Employees will need *some* time off from work to deal with personal needs

# Hidden Reason #3: Unidentified Medical Issue



# Identifying Medical Absences

- Supervisors should avoid discussing these topics with direct reports
- Don't ask for details, specifics or diagnoses
- Keep conversations high-level and focused on work
- Make sure medical information is confidential
- It's *your* responsibility to know when FMLA or ADA are triggered

# FMLA Leave

- FMLA only applies to certain businesses and certain employees
- Eligible employees are entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month span for serious health conditions they or their immediate family members face
- You can create your own FMLA policies, but if they differ from the law, you *must* follow the rules that are more favorable to the employee

# A Reasonable Accommodation?

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) lets workers with physical or mental disabilities request reasonable accommodations, including time off, to perform their jobs
- ADA applies to businesses with 15 or more employees
- ADA's definition of a "disability" is broad and could potentially cover most major illnesses

# Establishing Undue Hardship

- Employers don't have to accommodate if doing so causes undue hardship
- Records of employee workloads, job descriptions and financial reports can help prove undue hardship
- Amend handbooks to include attendance requirements
- Explore other options for accommodation



# Hidden Reason #4: Unreported Harassment



# Harassment by the Numbers

- Sexual harassment is the most widely known form of harassment
- In 2011, the EEOC received 11,364 sexual harassment allegations
- Race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex and disability are legally protected.
- Some local laws prohibit harassment on other characteristics, such as marital status and political affiliation

# What is Harassment?

- Harassment includes all forms of physical or verbal conduct that show hostility toward another person
  - Physical: invading someone's space, damaging property, making offensive gestures, etc.
  - Verbal: unwelcome comments, jokes, threats or insults, negative stereotyping, or possession or display of derogatory pictures or other graphic material
- To be *illegal*, harassment must:
  - Be related to an employee's protected class
  - Be unwelcome
  - Be severe or pervasive enough to interfere with performance or create an offensive, hostile work environment

# Harassment Training

- New employees should be trained on the definitions and consequences of harassment
- Provide training for ALL types of harassment
- Train managers and supervisors separately on additional responsibilities
- Separate harassment training from other onboarding
- Review harassment training regularly

# Harassment Policies

- Put no-harassment policies in writing
- Explain types of conduct that are illegal and prohibited
- Outline complaint procedures
- Include no-retaliation disclaimer
- Post in common areas or include in handbooks

# Hidden Reason #5: Inconsistent Recordkeeping

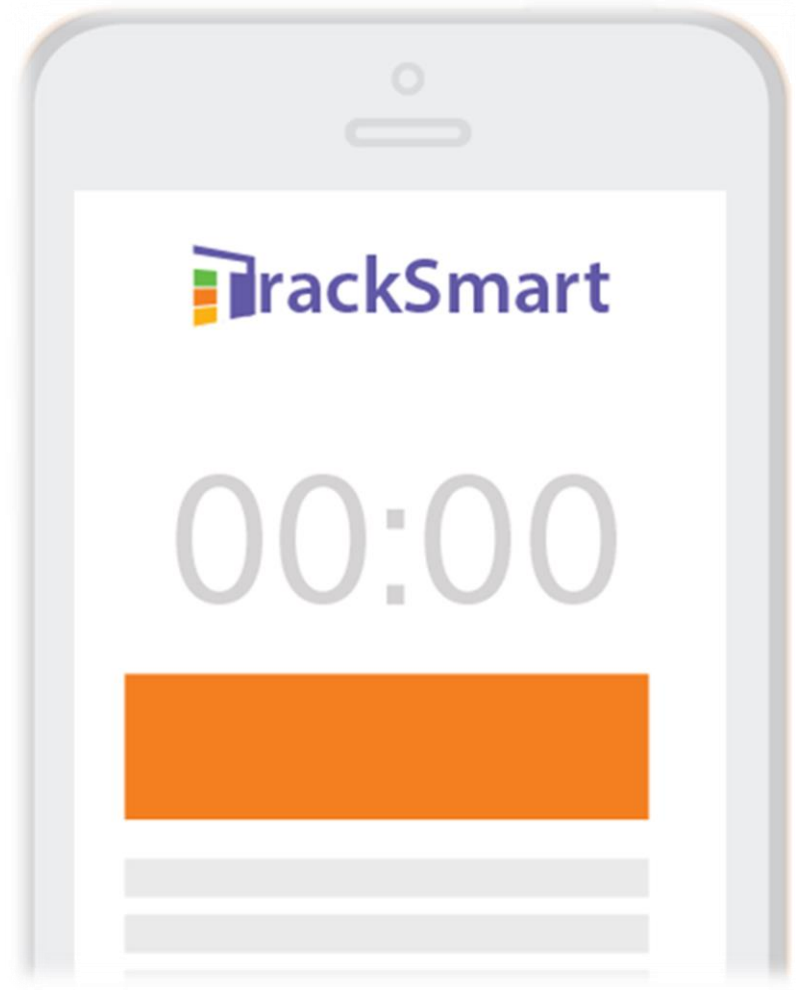


# Attendance Tracking

- Helps you see who's *supposed* to be out and who's not
- Software makes submitting and handling time-off requests easier
- Lets employees know how much PTO they have and whether or not their requests were approved

# Time Tracking

- Time clock software is more accurate than pen-and-paper timesheets
- Helps you spot patterns and problems
- Easier to submit and approve time-off requests
- Employees always have access to schedules, so no excuses for missing work





# Final Notes

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# Final Notes

- Use standardized job applications and conduct thorough background screens to ensure you hire responsible workers
- Clarify and communicate attendance policies
- Talk with employees to find out if their absences are due to medical conditions
- Provide workers with harassment training and written no-harassment policies that cover both sexual harassment and other forms of illegal harassment
- Track time and attendance to identify any patterns that may indicate underlying medical issues

# Thank you!

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