7 Ways to Prevent "Resenteeism" and Promote a Positive Workplace Culture

Insights

2.24.23

By now you've likely addressed quiet quitting in your workplace — the phenomenon where workers push back on hustle culture — but what happens if employees take it one step further and start to actively *resent* their employer? Signs of so-called "resenteeism" include negative attitudes, procrastination, poor performance, and a host of other toxic behaviors that can have dire consequences for your business if left unchecked. Fortunately, with a few checks and balances in place, you can keep a finger on the pulse of your organization and address potential problems before they escalate. Here are seven proactive steps you can take to address resenteeism and promote a positive workplace culture.

First, Some Background

Are you tired of workplace buzz words yet? You're probably saying "yes," but you also know that the latest trending terms are often used to describe very real behaviors and situations that employers encounter.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the Great Resignation created unusual circumstances that left many employers shorthanded. As a result, employees that stuck around may have taken on more responsibilities, worked longer hours, or otherwise filled the void during a significant labor shortage.

Those same employees may feel undervalued or underpaid in the face of record-high inflation, but they also may be afraid to leave steady employment with recent news of mass layoffs and other signs of an economic downturn. Sometimes they resort to "quiet quitting," rejecting hustle culture and refusing to go above the bare minimum required of them at work. Some workers call this "acting your wage" or doing only the amount of work they believe is reflected in their paycheck.

Sometimes, though, employees take it a step further, leading to "resenteeism" — which was a phrase recently coined to describe employees who *actively* express their resentment toward their job, their employer, or their co-workers. The term is a spin on "presenteeism," which occurs when workers physically show up to the job but don't actually get their work done because they're not feeling well or are otherwise preoccupied with circumstances outside of the office.

While presenteeism involves *passive* behaviors and a decline in productivity, resenteeism can be even more harmful if the employee is acting out and making their dissatisfaction known in disruptive ways. Thus, it's important for you to stay aware of what's going on in your workplace and take the following steps to curb negative behaviors while maintaining a welcoming environment for employees.

1. Create a Positive Workplace Culture

Toxic workplace cultures cost U.S. employers $223 billion between 2014 and 2019, according to a SHRM report. Since then, the pandemic created even more workplace challenges as managers and employees alike adapted to a new framework of remote and hybrid work arrangements. Indeed, 62% of HR professionals said maintaining workplace culture during the pandemic was difficult. These recent challenges highlight the importance of prioritizing employee engagement, transparency, and workplace satisfaction.

As you know, a company's culture starts at the top. Is your senior leadership team engaged? Do you have an open-door policy? Have you communicated your organization's values, and do your leaders embody those values? Have you asked your employees to share their own workplace priorities?

You may also want to take a look at your diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs. According to Glassdoor, 74% of job seekers say workplace diversity is important and more than 50% of employees wish their company did more to increase diversity. Accordingly, employers that embrace racial and gender diversity on their executive teams and publicly commit to DEI efforts in the workplace are more likely to attract and retain a broader group of workers.

Additionally, providing employees with education, training, and promotion opportunities can help you maintain a healthy work culture.

2. Schedule Regular Check-In Meetings with Employees

Regularly scheduled meetings between supervisors and team members are an essential tool to ensure your organization is operating smoothly. In particular, 1:1 meetings can help build trust with team members. These check-ins are even more important now that working from home is commonplace, as you don't want remote employees to feel lost in the shuffle. Employees who are meeting with their supervisors will feel more valued and heard through these regular channels. Moreover, problems can be addressed before they fester and solutions can be achieved to keep your team's work flowing effectively. As a result, productivity and effectiveness should increase and HR problems should decrease.

When you meet with workers, you can also remind them of your business objectives, review policies and procedures, and tie company goals to performance metrics. Make sure goals are realistic and measurable and employees know how they will be held accountable.

3. Conduct Exit Interviews and Stay Interviews

In addition to encouraging managers to schedule regular 1:1 meetings with their direct reports, you should consider conducting exit interviews and stay interviews. Holding exit interviews when employees resign can help you uncover and fix problems, improve your culture, and reduce further turnover.

While an exit interview is generally conducted with a departing employee before their last day, <u>a stay interview</u> serves as a temperature check with a high-performing, longer-term employee. The goal is to improve employee engagement and morale and address any concerns your employees have <u>before</u> they decide to leave. In a stay interview, you'll ask the employee what makes them keep coming back to your organization each day, what improvements can be made, and what career objectives they have.

4. Give Your Employees Multiple Ways to Address Their Concerns

Employees should know who they can contact if they have workplace concerns that they would like to address. Maybe they don't feel comfortable discussing an issue with their direct supervisor or they have a concern that involves their own manager. You can help by providing employees with multiple channels to report issues, such as a human resources representative, another manager, or even a hotline number or intranet reporting mechanism.

Moreover, if an employee is unhappy and disruptive because they feel bullied or have experienced unlawful harassment or discrimination, you'll want to have a reporting policy in place that encourages them to report their concerns about such issues immediately. Your anti-discrimination and anti-harassment policy should clearly state that your employees will not face retaliation as a result of their report. Providing this level of safety and security is important if you truly want to foster an open and respectful atmosphere.

5. Clearly Define Expectations

In response to staffing shortages, supervisors may have overlooked employee attendance and performance problems – but these issues can't be ignored long term. An employee may be driven to quietly quit or engage in resenteeism when expectations are unclear. Uncertainty can cause employees to become annoyed and vocal about their frustrations. To avoid this, set clearly defined expectations for your employees beyond just firm deadlines for projects. Employees need to understand what you expect from them on a general basis, as well as for their specific job duties. This means reviewing policies and procedures, re-examining what "productivity" looks like, updating job descriptions, and outlining specific performance expectations with metrics and attainable goals.

If expectations have already been defined and an employee is not rising to the occasion, tell them. Setting expectations serves no purpose if you do not require employees to meet them.

6. Discipline Employees Promptly When Warranted

Employees may express resenteeism in a variety of toxic ways that can lower morale and lead to job dissatisfaction for their co-workers. As we mentioned above, ignoring these problems can have a detrimental impact on your business— and that's why it's important to take swift action.

You can — and should — enforce your policies and maintain reasonable expectations. Unfortunately, however, performance issues and misconduct will sometimes lead to termination decisions, even after you have set expectations and developed plans for improvement. Be sure to consistently following your established policies and ensure compliance with federal, state, and local employment laws when disciplining and firing employees.

7. Develop a Rewards and Recognition Program

On a positive note, you surely have many employees who have worked diligently during the past few years of uncertainty. Don't forget to recognize and reward employees who meet or exceed performance goals. Your specific recognition program may depend on your business environment and company culture, but even saying "thank you" or recognizing an employee's accomplishments during a meeting can go a long way. For more formal programs, set clear guidelines, performance indicators, and award types so employees understand the criteria and can set their goals accordingly. Consider asking employees what types of rewards they would like to see the company offer.

Conclusion

We will continue to monitor the latest trends that impact the workplace. Make sure you are subscribed to Fisher Phillips' Insight System to get the most up-to-date information. For further information, contact the authors of this Insight or your Fisher Phillips attorney.

Related People

Emily N. Litzinger
Partner
502.561.3978
Email

George A. Reeves, III
Partner
803.255.0000
Email

Service Focus

Counseling and Advice