



PRESENTEEISM AND GOOD HEALTH

Charles Handy's 'age of uncertainty' is now more than ever a pressing concept for the British workforce. In today's current economic climate workers may feel under even more pressure to work longer hours. This is increasing the phenomenon known as presenteeism i.e. **'The feeling that one must show up for work even if one is too sick, stressed, or distracted to be productive; the feeling that one needs to work extra hours even if one has no extra work to do.'**

Work-related absenteeism already costs business around £750m each year. Alarming Professor Cary Cooper shares research on employee wellness suggests 420,000 employees in Britain in 2006 believed they were experiencing depression, anxiety or stress at work at levels that were making them ill. Cooper also noted a pressing issue was the number of workers who did not feel able to take time off when they were sick or stressed. In fact it was noted **"Presenteeism"** - where the individual is at work but not productive - **could cost the UK around £900m a year.**

We have all been in the situation where a co-worker has insisted on coming into work despite being really sick, coughing and spluttering their way through day - oblivious to the fact the whole office is now starting to succumb. We shouldn't need a Wellness Program in place to let us know good management practice would be to send the individual home. However, the Wellness Program is the communication tool that shares with employees that their companies wellness 'values' state it is not best practice to come to work whilst you are clearly sick.

The complexities of Presenteeism include:-

- Unrealistic expectation of management, where the completion of the task overrides good management practice which would be more person-centred. Unrealistic expectations can lead to stress induced illnesses and even burnout.
- If employees are experiencing mental anguish e.g. stress, anxiety, depression these emotional and cognitive concerns can cause memory loss, inability to concentrate, poor judgement, lack of productivity and impaired judgement.
- Employees feeling they must be present even with ailments such as colds, flu, migraine or headaches. In this situation not only does the individual under perform they can also be prolonging the duration of their physical distress.
- Employees may be feeling harassed or bullied at work in some way or office politics might be a source of constant irritation. Other disruptions can include poor team relations, difficulties with managers, redundancies, harmonisation processes which lead to significant organisational change and the like. Stressors such as the above can inhibit creative thinking and undermine performance and productivity.
- Changes in the employees personal life e.g. serious illness, divorce, childcare problems, financial problems etc.,) Being pre-occupied with outside concerns will reduce workplace productivity. Employee Assistance Programs have been found to support employees most effectively in these circumstances.

Most employers know their employees' absenteeism rates, but how many can say the same for presenteeism rates? If an employee comes to work not well or even contagious they can infect others and result in further loss of productivity. When employees come to work suffering from 'negative' stress, anxiety or depression this means working with conditions that impair not only their own performance and productivity but the productivity and performance of others.