

# Sick or just sick of work?

December 3 2008

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(PhysOrg.com) -- With the winter weather making it hard to get out of bed in the morning, some employees may contemplate calling in sick to work, even if they feel just a bit under the weather. But a Purdue University ethics expert says making a habit out of that can hurt your reputation.

"If you've got a contagious illness, then it's a responsible decision to stay home so you won't infect your co-workers," says Linda Naimi, an assistant professor of organizational leadership and supervision. "But for those who always have an excuse to miss work, they should remember that we all get sick and tired. Part of being an adult is that you must think of those who depend on you being there to get the job done: your co-workers, your supervisors and the community you serve."

According to a recent study conducted by human resources consulting firm Mercer, the total cost of planned and unplanned absences in the workplace is at least 36 percent of the cost payroll - or about twice as much as the cost of health care - to an organization.

Naimi, an attorney who teaches courses in ethical behavior in business settings, says employees who skip work when they don't have a valid reason hurt not just themselves but also those around them.

"When you don't show, others must take up the slack. What message are you sending? If you miss work frequently, your co-workers and supervisor may begin to think you simply don't care enough about your job or the work you do to be there," she says. "Trust and respect are

earned. It can take months, even years, to build trust, but only moments to lose it. When you make excuses to be absent from work, you withdraw from your trust account."

She says those who are frequently absent will have a difficult time getting sympathy and understanding when they do have a legitimate reason to miss work. Naimi says chronic absenteeism also affects morale.

"When co-workers see an employee abusing sick leave or vacation leave and getting away with this behavior, they may think, 'If he can do it, so can I.' This can be disastrous for any organization."

Naimi says those who miss work frequently often don't see their value in a company, may be looking for attention or may have other personal issues that should be addressed. She says managers should meet with employees who are chronically absent and seek to understand what is causing the behavior. Employee assistance programs and counseling services might be helpful, as can making adjustments in work schedules and duties, if warranted. Disciplinary actions may be used as a last resort, she says.

"Every employee should understand that he or she plays an important role in his or her organization," she says. "They need to know they're not just a cog in a wheel. When employees feel respected, when they work as part of a team and when they know that others count on them every day, they are more likely to enjoy coming to work."

Naimi says it's especially important that employees realize their worth in times of economic uncertainty and during the holidays, which is a time when people take vacation or are legitimately ill.

"We need you now more than ever," she says. "During a recession, jobs

are hard to find, and everyone should remember that there are many people who would love to have your job. And if there are cuts looming at your business, perception often becomes reality. Those who act like they don't care about their job may be the first out the door."

Provided by Purdue University

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