

Misuse of Time By Employees Comes Down To Performance

written by Rory Lodge | July 15, 2014



Some employee challenges are easy to identify and others are just a little more complicated. When it comes to the question of employee time theft on the surface the issue would appear fairly straightforward; an employee claims to be engaged in work during working hours when, in fact, he/she is not. No organization wants to pay an employee for work that is not being delivered.

The most common and easy to identify forms of time theft involve the situation where an employee claims to be on a work site when he/she is elsewhere and engaged in activities unrelated to his/her employment is a problem. However, there is more to time theft than being late or slipping away from work. Employees who spend too much time ignoring work, daydreaming, playing games, chatting or doing non-work tasks during work time are also stealing time. Unfortunately these subtle forms of time theft can be very difficult to catch, monitor and prove.

In an effort to manage employee time theft there are a few things to consider

1) Is the time theft purposeful or a result of another issue in the workplace or with the individual?

1. Does an employee have enough work to keep him/her busy?
2. Does the employee have an underlying health or disability challenge that is impacting the proper use of time at work
3. Is there a problem in the team or supervisor within which the employee operates
4. Is the employee capable of doing the job or does the employee know what to do?
5. Is the employee even aware that their behaviour constitutes misuse of time?

2) Is the time theft causing a problem in the workplace?

1. Are other employees disrupted by the time theft of another employee
2. Is work going undone as a result of the time theft?
3. Are others negatively impacted by the apparent time theft of another employee
4. Is the employee getting his/her work done?

If time theft is purposeful, in that the employee is choosing to abandon work, it is important to see this as stealing and address this as a disciplinary problem.

If the time theft is more result of poor training, lack of job skills or a result of thoughtless habits considering addressing these reasons as a useful way to mitigate the problem.

Clearly Determine What is Acceptable and What is Not

To better understand and consider the question of time theft it is important to define it as an organization. If your employees are provided with a flexible workplace that allows them to work where they want and come and go as they please you have to understand and clarify what constitutes a time theft problem in your view.

If you cannot judge the situation based on hours or location of one of the best indicators to focus on is the performance and productivity level of an individual employee. If an employee is performing up to expectations it may be that the smaller workplace disruptions are a matter of perception and not necessarily a problem. Be careful about creating problems when they do not exist.

Look at Performance and Productivity

If an employee's performance or productivity are below the standard then approach misuse of time as a performance problem. An employee who is not focussed on work is not performing as expected. Identify for the employee what appropriate workplace performance looks like including attending to and prioritising workplace activities over personal activities.

To address performance issues you may provide additional instruction, formal performance expectations and more frequent monitoring. Most people do not want to steal time they simply lose focus and their brain takes them somewhere comfortable and familiar. Help your employee regain focus by focussing on personal awareness and then performance management interventions.

Tips for helping employees break bad habits that lead to performance problems

- 1) Identify the bad habit (i.e. too much texting, chatting instead of working)
- 2) Determine triggers that impact the desire to engage in the bad habit.
- 3) Identify positive and affirming words and actions that can change person's actions.
- 4) Practice substituting another action, item or behaviour for the bad habit.
- 5) Repeat positive words and new behaviours frequently

Retraining your brain to look at and react differently at a situation takes a little time, effort and repetition. However to improve productivity in the workplace addressing misuse of time is an important component. Help your employees identify their misuse of time problems and then help them figure out their options for improving their performance next time.