QUIZ: Are Employees Entitled to Paid Bereavement Leave?



Situation

Susan and her mother live and work in Québec. Six months ago, Susan's sister, Jo, moved to Newfoundland and started a new job. One terrible Sunday evening, Susan called her mom with some shocking news: her husband, Jack, has just died unexpectedly. Susan is shocked, distraught and in desperate need of support. Mom relays the news to Jo and both women promise to take the week off from work to help Susan deal with her loss, look after her two children and make funeral arrangements. All three women work full-time and want to take bereavement leave.

Question

Who is entitled to *paid* bereavement leave?

A) None of the three are entitled to any paid bereavement leave.
B) All three are entitled to a week of paid bereavement leave.
C) Susan and Jo, but not their mother, are entitled to one day of paid bereavement leave each.
D) Susan and her mother, but not Jo, are entitled to one day of paid bereavement leave.

ANSWER

C) Susan and Jo, but not their mother, are each entitled to a day of paid bereavement leave.

EXPLANATION

Most employees are entitled to take some time off from work for the death of a family member without being fired or disciplined for absence. But the rules governing bereavement leave and whether it's paid vary by province, in part on the basis of how closely the employee is related to the family member who dies. This example, which is purely hypothetical, illustrates some of the key differences.

The Québec *Labour Standards Act* allows for one paid day of bereavement leave when an employee's spouse, child or parent dies. Susan works in Québec; and the bereavement is due to loss of a spouse. So she gets one day of paid (and four days of unpaid) bereavement leave. Susan's mother also works in Québec. But because Jack is her son-in-law and not her spouse, child or parent, she doesn't get paid bereavement leave under the law (although she can take a day of unpaid leave).

Newfoundland, where Jo works, happens to be the only other province requiring paid bereavement leave. As in Québec, eligible employees are entitled to one day of paid leave (but only two days of unpaid leave). But the leave covers the death of a spouse, parent, grandchild, grandparent, sibling or close in-law, such as a brother-in-law. To qualify for leave, employees must also have worked with the same company for at least 30 days. Jo has. And Jack is her brother-in-law. So Jo gets a day of paid bereavement leave.

WHY WRONG ANSWERS ARE WRONG

A) is wrong because paid bereavement leave is provided by QC and NL (and under Fed law). All other jurisdictions allow only unpaid bereavement leave.

B) is wrong because NL and QC allow one day, not one week of paid bereavement leave. Susan is also entitled to four days of unpaid leave under QC law and Jo two days of unpaid leave under NL law.

D) is wrong because although Susan and Jo do get a day of paid bereavement leave, their mother doesn't. In Québec, employees get one day of paid and four days of unpaid bereavement leave for the death of a spouse, child, parent or sibling and only one day of unpaid leave for the death of other family members such as a son-in-law, daughter-in-law, grandparent, grandchild and the parents and siblings of the employee's spouse.