

The Hidden Productivity Drain “Presenteeism”

As your partner in addressing workplace issues, CARE’s WorkLife Solutions responds when employees are having work performance issues, there are conflicts between work groups, or when there has been a critical incident. These types of work place issues all have something in common; they are easily identifiable and incredibly visible. What about those employees that still show up to work, trying to just make it through the day? Those employees that are just getting by? In other words, being present but not engaged. There are a litany of things that get in the way of us being our best selves are work. Physical health problems, mental health issues, home or relationship conflicts are some causes of what is known as presenteeism.

Defining Presenteeism

Most of us strive being able to leave work at work so we can focus on our family and home life. One way to look at

presenteeism is bringing home into work.

Initially, presenteeism pertained only to individuals who were present at work, but struggled with performance due to illness or health problems. Essentially, they are “hanging on.” We’ve all seen the staff person or colleague show up despite having the flu and try to get by. Nowadays, presenteeism definitions often include home problems or stress as well. To be clear, presenteeism isn’t about the employees that have never been able to get the job done well. It relates to individuals who are able to perform at expectation, but for one reason or another, are showing up to work and meet previous performance levels. These employees are dedicated to the job enough to show up to work despite being sick, overwhelmed, stressed, or otherwise not at 100%. And that tends to have higher costs than absenteeism.



Understanding the Impacts

The *Harvard Business Review* reported way back in 2004 placed the cost of presenteeism at \$150,000,000,000 annually in the United States. Yes, that is \$150 billion. That research was done a decade and a half ago. With increase in divisiveness in our communities and country, it’s easy to assume that this cost has increased. In addition to the advent of our “always on” culture in the United States, being at 100% on the job is harder than ever. One research study in 2016 by *Global Corporate Challenge* found that while employees miss on average 4 productive days per year due to illness, there was an

average of 57.5 productive days each year lost due to presenteeism.

From a dollars and cents perspective, it's easy to see this needs to be addressed.

Presenteeism also impacts workplace culture. Not only do their physical, emotional, or life issues affect the "present" employee, but so is the organization and their co-workers. Those employees showing up at less than 100% can experience shorter tempers with co-workers, customers, and managers. This, in turn, can lead to lower morale, and overall a less effective organization. It is common knowledge that stress, emotional and physical health problems can lead to sleep issues, which also leads to more mistakes, higher risk for accidents, and more illness.

Addressing the Issue

There are a variety of things organizations are able to do to combat presenteeism.

Here are some quick suggestions:

- Be aware of the issues, and provide training to all employees, especially supervisors/managers
- Set clear productivity standards and make sure

employees are aware of them.

- Consider starting or continuing wellness programming around the workplace. This can help decrease some of the underlying factors related to presenteeism.
- Offer wellness focused professional development trainings or "lunch and leans" around things like stress, managing work-life balance, time management, or conflict resolution
- Promote the benefits and rewards employees have available to them, such as the EAP.

The best thing about these strategies, CARE's WorkLife Solutions can do the heavy lifting. As your partner to in employee well-being, we are a resource you can depend on to address presenteeism or a host of other common workplace concerns.

Reach out to us at (866) 888-1555 so we can discuss how to address the problem of presenteeism, or how to help the organizational well-being in some other way.

Life Happens, We Can Help

For any human resource consulting, wellness initiative planning, or ways to best utilize your EAP, CARE's WorkLife Solutions, call Adam McHenry, Director—WorkLife Solutions at (586) 244-2877

To schedule a professional development training on time management, stress management, or developing resiliency, call Joe Gulino, Training Coordinator at (586) 218-5288.