

## The high cost of absenteeism

Recent research shows that the South African economy is losing about R12 billion every year due to absenteeism. The cost of absenteeism to a company equates not only to the person's salary for the day he or she is not working but up to three times that amount taking into consideration the productive time lost.

There are two types of absenteeism: one is deliberate, which we affectionately referred to as 'bunkalitis' at school. The other is genuine absenteeism, meaning it's outside the control of the employee. Genuine absenteeism usually results from injury or sickness and there's not much a company can do to mitigate it, other than to encourage a healthy lifestyle and monitor health issue trends of employees to ensure the sick leave is not being abused and encourage staff members with high absenteeism to implement strategies to improve their health.

The biggest cause for genuine absenteeism is flu and we suggest that companies introduce a flu vaccination programme which will immunize staff members against the latest strains. Wellness programmes at work have shown to reduce sickness at the workplace by, among others, encouraging a healthy lifestyle which includes a focus on diet and fitness. However reality is that people do get sick.

Where companies can make a difference is in the high level of deliberate absenteeism and the maintenance of proper records can greatly expedite the process. You need to get a sense of the size and cost of your absenteeism problem which can be gathered from information gained from analyzing attendance registers. Data which should be sourced would include detail such as the duration of the absence, trends (which days are most popular for 'sick' leave), costs of the sick leave absences and the type of illnesses that occur most frequently.

These records can then be used to develop a return-to-work conversation forum in which the immediate supervisor can talk to the employee about his or her reasons for missing work. This forum is not necessarily an inquisition: it is intended to show that yours is a caring company that looks after the welfare of its employees. However, guilty employees will be taken aback at the detail of your records and will probably think twice before bunking again.