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Small Business Bulletin

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Report: Employee Leave Requests Rose in 2024, Mental Health Among Key Reasons

Employee leave requests increased for the third consecutive year in 2024, according to the 2025 State of Leave and Accommodations report from software firm AbsenceSoft.

As expected, the survey revealed that recovery from an illness or injury was the top reason for employees' leave requests, with 57% of employers reporting these as a top-three most common cause. However, managing mental health issues followed closely at 47%, making it the second most common reason for leave requests. Other top reasons included caring for a parent, relative or child and bereavement and pregnancy leave.

Furthermore, mental health conditions were the most frequently cited reason for employees seeking job accommodations in 2024.

Key Findings

The AbsenceSoft report highlighted new trends and challenges organizations face regarding leave and accommodations. Other notable findings included the following:

- The most requested accommodation in 2024 was remote work, followed by intermittent leave and additional breaks. Other common accommodations include specialized equipment or changes in workspace.
- Both employers and employees want a streamlined, transparent process for leave and accommodation requests.
- A positive leave or accommodations experience boosts employee motivation, productivity and workplace loyalty. Conversely, negative experiences can lead to feelings of being undervalued and unsupported.

- Nearly one-third of employers plan to introduce new paid leave benefits in 2025; paid medical and parental leave are the most common additions.

Employer Takeaway

This report shows that leave and accommodations are on the rise. As such, small businesses should be prepared to meet the needs of employees and comply with all applicable federal, state and local rules and regulations. Contact us for more resources.

Employee Engagement Tips for Small Businesses

Small businesses often face an uphill battle when it comes to retaining employees. Limited budgets, lean teams and fewer advancement opportunities can make it difficult to compete with larger companies. However, better engagement is one of the most cost-effective and impactful ways to improve employee retention. When employees feel heard, valued and connected to their work, they're more likely to stay.

This article explores employee engagement and provides tips small businesses can implement to improve engagement at their organizations.


What Is Employee Engagement?

"Employee engagement" is not just a buzz phrase. It's a powerful force that can drive a business forward. It refers to an employee's emotional and psychological commitment to their work and organization. Engaged employees bring energy, creativity and purpose to their jobs. They care about their performance and the success of the business. Conversely, disengaged employees are more likely to underperform, feel dissatisfied and eventually seek work elsewhere. By fostering engaged employees and build a team success.

Importantly, engaged employees experience higher job satisfaction. It's a

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KEYSTONE



Employees can be satisfied without being engaged, but they're more likely to stay, grow and contribute to the company's success when they are engaged.

Practical Employee Engagement Tips for Small Businesses

The good news is that boosting engagement doesn't have to be expensive. Many of the most effective strategies require intention and consistency rather than money. Here are some engagement strategies small businesses can implement:

- **Communicate openly and frequently.** Clear, transparent communication builds trust and helps employees feel involved. Regular check-ins, team meetings and honest updates about the business's direction give employees a sense of ownership. Leadership should make room for feedback—both ways.
- **Recognize and celebrate contributions.** Employees want to feel seen. Publicly recognize accomplishments, no matter how small. A simple shout-out in a team meeting or a handwritten note can go a long way. Make recognition part of the culture, not an occasional gesture.
- **Offer autonomy and flexibility.** Give employees control over how they do their work when possible. Trusting them to manage their time, take initiative or work remotely when needed shows respect and fosters responsibility. Flexibility can significantly improve morale.
- **Provide growth opportunities.** Small businesses can offer growth even without a large training budget or a surplus of available leadership positions. Invite employees to take on new responsibilities, lead projects or cross-train in different areas. Offer mentorship, encourage self-directed learning and support professional development goals.

- **Foster a positive work environment.** Culture matters. Aim to create a workplace where people enjoy coming to work. This doesn't require fancy perks—just kindness, respect, support and team spirit. Encourage collaboration and make space for humor, celebration and camaraderie.

Conclusion

Small businesses may not always have the resources to offer big bonuses or expansive benefit packages, but they can create engaging work environments. While compensation and benefits remain critical factors for employees, small businesses can focus on engagement as a cost-effective way to win over and keep workers. They can foster a sense of value, support and connection that larger companies often struggle to maintain. Engagement is a strategy small businesses can implement and excel at, making it a goal well within reach.

These businesses can improve employee satisfaction and loyalty without breaking the bank by focusing on communication, recognition, flexibility and purpose. In the long run, an engaged team is easier to retain and more motivated to help businesses thrive.

Reach out today for more resources.