



Absence may not necessarily make the heart grow fonder

Posted March 21, 2011

by By Kelley M. Butler [Comments \(3\)](#)

Staying connected to workers on disability leave may be more important than you realize.

Hello, everyone — I'm baaaaack. Perhaps you didn't even notice I was gone, but today's post is my first in nearly two weeks. I was taking some much-needed time off to recharge my batteries and tend to family events.

During that time, I learned that my daughter's beloved preschool teacher had tendered her resignation, following a two-month disability leave to recover from a serious car accident.

Although she'd healed physically, it seems her emotional wounds were a different story. After so long away, she apparently felt it would be too hard to get back into the swing of teaching and caring for the children.

So, even though she was offered light-duty options, she resigned instead.

That got me thinking, especially since after these last two weeks out of the office, I got used to not working. Yes, it was vacation — not disability — I had a firm return date, and I like my work and my coworkers.

Still, I had fleeting thoughts that maybe, just maybe, it would be easier to hang it up. No one *really* missed me, after all.

I thought, maybe that's how my daughter's teacher felt. I'll be the first to admit that teaching toddlers is much tougher than my job. Plus, three-year-olds have short memories, and it didn't seem that many of her coworkers had kept in touch during her leave.

Maybe she thought resigning and starting fresh somewhere else was the best thing to do.

I think it says something about the value of staying connected to employees when they're on disability leave. So, I point you toward *EBN's* featured report this month, "Back into the fold," which highlights the importance of outreach in helping employees on disability return to work successfully.

3 Comment(s)

Posted by: .5 | March 28, 2011 3:34 PM

Your commentary is absolutely correct - and it works on both sides. Out of sight can be out of mind. Our goal should always be full engagement - encouraging full productivity while at work and communication while off on disability/absence. Often it is just a simple call from the supervisor or coworkers that makes that happen. Staying in the "loop" assures that the employee is always reminded that their return to work is expected and anticipated. Marcia Carruthers, Disability Management Employer Coalition (DMEC)

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Posted by: Alison Daily | March 23, 2011 5:59 PM

Great story! It's extremely important to keep in touch with employees while they're out on leave. It's important to know there's a line between intrusive and supportive. You want to show them they're valued team members, and that their contributions are appreciated. Also, respecting their time off and knowing when to communicate with them will help validate their worth.

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Posted by: R B | March 22, 2011 2:22 PM

Staying in touch is very important. I was recently out on maternity leave after my second child and I had one coworker who called me at least once a week to tell me about what I was missing in the office. My manager also called me about every other week to keep me informed of things happening at the company and especially things that affected my role. Going back to work after my second maternity leave was so much easier than after my first because I had been kept in the loop on a lot of things and didn't feel like I had lost my place when I returned.

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