Expert Advice on Sick Leave (Clerical and Service Staff)

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Adedayo: Welcome to Leading Edge online. My name is Adedayo Adeniyi. I am the Director for Leadership and Organization Development in the office of the vice president for human resources. Joining me today is Sharon Williams. Sharon is Senior Employee Relations Specialist. Welcome, Sharon.

Sharon: Thanks, Adedayo.

Adedayo: Today's focus is clerical service staff sick leave. Sharon, can you please share with us the principle purpose of this policy and why it was established?

Sharon: The university established this policy because it realized that clerical and service staff employees would, from time to time, require time off for illness. So they provided this leave as a means to -- for employees to do that on a paid status.

Adedayo: So is this policy specific to the employee's illness? Or does it also cover other family illness and other things of that nature?

Sharon: Clerical and service staff accrue 80 hours of sick leave per year, and they can use up to 80 hours of that for members of their immediate family, which would be people like parents, spouse, child, grandchildren, grandparents, people like that who are in their immediate family.
**Adedayo:** Is there a maximum number of days that you can use in a year for a family member's illness as supposed to your own illness?

**Sharon:** You can use 10 days or 80 hours.

**Adedayo:** Sharon, is sick leave a use it or lose it type of leave? But if it's not, what happens to the time that would stay on someone's account if they were to retire or if they were to leave the university?

**Sharon:** Sick leave can be accrued up to no maximum. If an employee would leave the university, they would not be paid for it. However, if they stayed here and were eligible to be an official retiree from the university, they would be paid 25 percent of the first 520 hours and 100 percent of any hours over that. It's also important for supervisors to encourage clerical and service staff to accrue a balance of sick leave, so that in the event that they would have a serious health condition, that would take them out of the work place for a while, they would have enough paid sick leave to make it to short-term disability if they elected that or to long-term disability.

**Adedayo:** Sharon, what tips would you provide to the supervisor in order to remain compliant with this policy?

**Sharon:** I think it's important that supervisors have employees fill out the appropriate paperwork when they need to use sick leave. If it's an instance where the employee just wakes up that morning and they're ill, they can fill out the paperwork when they return the next day, or whenever it is they return. If it's something that they know that they're going to be out, going out for some type of surgery, then they can complete the paperwork ahead of time. If the employee is
gone for a long time on sick leave, the odds are that the supervisor will need a return to work slip from that employee. So it's important that they know when they'll need a return to work slip. As we've said in some of these other sessions, FMLA covers everything. And so it's important that supervisors realize that, if the employee is gone for more than three consecutive calendar days on sick leave, that they may have a situation where this would also qualify for FMLA. But it's also important for supervisors to remember that they shouldn't be asking too much information from the employee. If they call in and they say they're sick, you should accept it at face value and say, well, what are you -- instead of saying what are you sick with or what's your problem today or those kinds of things, just accept it at face value, because under some of our other policies you could be treating the employee differently by having too much medical information.

**Adedayo:** So if supervisors' questioning whether or not an employee's sickness is authentic or something of that nature, what should they do?

**Sharon:** The supervisors should contact human resources, and we can help work through that situation with use to the satisfaction of both you and the employee.

**Adedayo:** Sharon, what are the common errors a supervisor and employees make when implementing this policy?

**Sharon:** I think sometimes supervisors don't have the employee fill out the paperwork in a timely manner, and so that's really important. It's also important that supervisors not get too much medical information from an employee. It's human nature to ask for that information, but it's the kind of information that come back and bite you one day. So you need to stay away from asking specific medical information.
Adedayo: So how much medical information is too much?

Sharon: If somebody calls you up and says I need to be away for surgery, and so then you ask them what kind of surgery, and they tell you that they need gallbladder surgery. And so then that, you ask them well, gee, what kind of gallbladder surgery are you having? Or are you having the kind where they can do it with a scope? Or are they going to have to cut you open or whatever? You just don't need that information. All you really need to know is that the employee needs to be away from work, and the reason is for illness.

Adedayo: So it sounds like when they call in and say I'm having surgery, that was sufficient information. And then human resources will assist in collecting the rest of that medical data type of.

Sharon: Certainly, if they say they need surgery, that's efficient for you to know that they need to be away for sick leave. And it's also probably a situation where it will require filling FMLA paperwork as well.

Adedayo: Sharon, are there any type of errors that are made around medical restrictions and things of that nature?

Sharon: There can be. When an employer returns to work, if they have a statement from their healthcare provider that says they can return to work, but they have certain restrictions, sometimes it's a supervisor's inclination to say well, I can't work with that restriction, and tell the employee to go home. If an
employer returns with restrictions, you need to contact human resources and we can help deal with that situation.

**Adedayo:** Say, for example, a supervisor, an employee came back with a restriction and the supervisor said yeah, I can work with that restriction. Is that also an error? Should they have still called human resources, even though they thought that they could work with the restriction?

**Sharon:** They can go ahead and work with the restriction. But I think they should still make the employee aware that they could have an issue. That is an accommodation under ADA. And so the person would need to work with either Pat Russell or Marcie Hintzman to come to a decision as to whether or not they have a disability under the ADA.

**Adedayo:** So it sounds like the right thing to do from a supervisor perspective. If someone comes in with a restriction, the supervisor comes over to human resources to discuss that restriction.

**Sharon:** Yes, I think that's a very good idea.

**Adedayo:** Sharon, as we wrap things up today, are there any parting thoughts that you'd like to leave with the supervisors?

**Sharon:** Well, sick leave is an important benefit that the university provides to members of the clerical and service staff. Completing the proper paperwork and having the proper forms when the employee returns to work are all important
parts of this. But if everything is done right, then it can be a win-win situation for everyone.

**Adedayo:** Sharon, we thank you very much for your input and your advice. And we look forward to meeting with you in another session.

**Sharon:** Thanks, Adedayo.