

Managing annual holidays

Successfully managing annual holidays is about balancing the needs of the organisation with the needs and preferences of employees. Annual holiday planning typically comes up when organisations start looking at introducing work-life balance practices. Issues to be considered include:

- when holidays can be taken
- what the difficulties might be in scheduling holidays
- whether there is sufficient cover available while people are on holiday
- holidays that are withdrawn (i.e. for production reasons)
- how to deal with competing demands for holiday periods
- how much holiday time is available, and whether it is possible for people to negotiate or buy additional time
- people not knowing or understanding arrangements related to taking leave or time-in-lieu
- real or perceived unfairness about leave provisions.

The following suggestions may help you through the process.

- Make sure you know the rights and responsibilities under the Holidays Act 2003.
- Work with staff to identify any times of the year when work demands mean that leave is difficult except for emergencies. Make sure that new employees know about these times as well.
- Sit down as a team and work out cover for times like school holidays.
- Involve the team in developing rules for managing annual holiday requests over busy periods. For example, one retailer has a rule that only those who need to travel to be with family for Christmas day can have Christmas eve off.
- Be clear about minimum staffing requirements in relation to numbers of staff, and the skill/experience mix required at any one time. This makes it easier when people might want to negotiate and/or organise swapping days.
- Encourage people to plan taking annual holidays in advance. Stress that the more notice you are given, the more likely that the request for holiday time can be

agreed. Prompt them to think about things they may want holiday time for, such as religious holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, sports events, arts festivals or periods when they might expect to need a rest (e.g. after a busy spell).

- Encourage people to apply for holidays in writing. Document all agreements.
- Use visual representations e.g. wall planners so people can see where there are windows of opportunity for taking annual holidays.
- Be open to people wanting to negotiate additional annual holidays in return for a lower salary.

Make sure that staff use their annual holidays.

- In some organisations the issue is not about meeting people's holiday preferences, instead it is about getting them to take holidays! Lots of accumulated holiday time is not good for the balance sheet, nor for the employee's health and well-being. It can be useful to:
 - monitor annual holiday balances carefully. Set up a prompt to remind you and the employee that holidays need to be planned and taken
 - monitor stress levels in conjunction with leave balances
 - encourage people to plan holidays. Use occasions such as scheduled performance discussions, business planning or anniversaries to prompt action.

For further information:

Department of Labour – www.ers.dol.govt.nz/holiday_act_2003

This website has information about the rights and responsibilities of employers and employees under the Holidays Act 2003.