

## **Return to Work Not Just for Workers' Compensation Claimants**

More employers are using return-to-work programs for injured workers even if they were not injured on the job, according to a study by Prudential Insurance Co. of America.

Many employers have a return-to-work program for their injured employees because it cuts down on workers' comp claims costs and lets the worker get back to feeling productive.

But more employers have also started returning employees to work who have been off duty due to non-job-related ailments.

The survey found that 49% of large employers have a return-to-work program for their disability programs, and another 22% of employers plan to add such programs in the near future.

Prudential noted that workers' comp and non-occupational disability return-to-work programs should be similar in approach, and that both can save a company money.

While the cost/benefit numbers are more readily apparent in the workers' comp arena, they may not be as easily identified in programs for non-work-related injuries or disabilities.

But, if you have an experienced staff member that is out of action, and work is not getting done or it's being performed by someone with less experience and skill, it can hurt your operations and bottom line.

The benefits of a return-to-work program include:

- Improved productivity,
- Improved morale across an organization,
- Saving organizations time and money, and
- Protecting you from losing talent.

Examples of effective return-to-work strategies include offering the opportunity to work part time, telecommuting, modifying work duties, modifying schedules, and implementing reasonable accommodations to provide employees with the tools and resources they need to carry out their responsibilities.

Efforts such as these can help employees return to work sooner, even while still recovering.

This allows the employee to protect their earning power while at the same time boosting the organization's productivity.

Also, in many instances, the ability to return to work after injury or illness plays an important role in the employee's recovery process.

## **Setting up a return-to-work program**

Steps you can take to reintegrate an injured employee into the workplace include:

- The worker and doctor should discuss recovery time, expected pain duration, need for drugs if any and options for returning to work.
- The worker should resume, if possible, work that meets restrictions and requirements outlined by the treating physician.
- Workplace guidelines should be written out and provided to the employee and employer.
- The doctor should be included in determining if the physical demands of a modified job are appropriate for the recovering worker.
- The doctor must understand the patient's work tasks and create work-place guidelines for the worker and employer. The guidelines should be flexible and updated regularly to reflect the workers' improving medical condition.
- Physical therapy can be used to simulate specific job demands so that the worker can eventually resume previous work duties without re-injury during the return-to-work phase.

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