HRInsights

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Time Tracking in the Time of COVID-19

Keeping track of employee productivity has always been important, but it's even more significant in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the majority of employers allowing remote work, accurate time tracking isn't always a guarantee.

However, despite the challenge, it's critical that all employers strive for accuracy. In fact, not doing so can lead to confusion, lost productivity and other consequences.

This article outlines an employer's general time tracking responsibilities and offers some best practices to follow.

Employer Legal Responsibilities

Employers are required to compensate employees for all hours worked, "suffered or permitted," according to the Department of Labor (DOL). That means any time an employee is working on a business-related task, they must be paid for it.

The DOL has made it clear that it doesn't matter where or when work-related duties are completed, even if they fall outside an employee's typical schedule—employees must be compensated for having completed them.

While rules differ slightly between exempt employees and nonexempt employees, employers generally have the same obligation: to pay employees for any time worked, no matter where or when it was worked. There is some room for dispute when it comes to unauthorized work, but a good time tracking policy would eliminate much of that possibility.

Time Tracking Policy Best Practices

The following section provides some time tracking policy tips and best practices for employers.

Make It Easy

A time tracking policy should be easy to understand and easy to enforce. For nonexempt employees, this is relatively straightforward as they will likely need to clock in and out, and will have designated breaks.

On the other hand, exempt employees may be asked to keep track of their own hours worked. Or, they might only track hours *not* worked, while their remaining scheduled time is presumed as having been worked.

Employers can devise whatever system is best for them. They may also choose to employ any number of automation tools. These include software that monitors productivity, online tools for logging hours or a variety of other solutions. Regardless of the method used, accurate time tracking is the ultimate goal.

Communicate Expectations

Once a policy is devised, it must be communicated to everyone in the workplace. It should clearly define employee groups, when they're expected to work and how they must track their time. It should also provide instances of when work is expressly unauthorized or what to do if a project

requires more time but an employee already reached their weekly hours. Be sure to provide a contact for employee questions.

Establish a Recordkeeping System

Once employees log their hours, it's the employer's responsibility to retain that data. Not only is it important for accurate reporting, but it can also impact workplace conversations. For instance, an employee's record may show a decline in hours worked over a quarter, which may necessitate coaching. Having this time tracking data will be important for following up with them later in the year. Such data will also be critical if anyone disputes the hours logged.

Reward Employees for Time Tracking

Incentivizing employees for accurately logging their hours can be a great way to achieve 100% compliance. For instance, an employer may offer $10 gift cards to employees each quarter if they submitted their timesheets before the deadline each period.

Alternatively, an employer may choose to only reward exceptional time tracking. This could mean meticulously tracking hours worked on a project, categorizing those hours and notating each chunk of time. Having this kind of drill-down data can lead to important workplace efficiencies. Rewarding detailed time tracking may encourage this behavior.

Conclusion

Time tracking will differ between organizations, but the end goal is the same: to accurately log employee time. Not only can this data inform operational workflows, but it's often necessary for appropriately compensating employees.

However, a poor time tracking policy may be just as bad as no policy at all. Employers should be sure to follow the best practices from this article to avoid common pitfalls.