

Nearly One-Third of Workers Called in Sick with Fake Excuses in the Last Year, CareerBuilder.com's Annual Survey Shows

- Employers Share 12 Most Unusual Reasons Employees Gave to Explain an Absence -

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Is the cough on the other end of the line real? According to CareerBuilder.com's annual survey on absenteeism at the office, 32 percent of workers said they have called in sick when they were well at least once in the last year. And while the majority of employers (75 percent) said they typically believe excuses given by employees, 35 percent reported they have checked up on an employee who called in sick and 16 percent said they have fired a worker for missing work without a legitimate excuse. The survey included 5,989 workers and 2,929 hiring managers and human resource professionals.

Twenty-seven percent of workers said they consider their sick days to be equivalent to vacation days and one-in-ten admitted to playing hooky three times or more even though they were feeling well. One-in-five workers (23 percent) said they took the day off simply because they just didn't feel like going to work that day. Fifteen percent missed work because they needed to relax, 11 percent had a doctor's appointment, 9 percent wanted to catch up on sleep and another 9 percent had plans with family and friends.

More than half (52 percent) of employers say Monday is the most popular day for employee absenteeism, followed by Friday at 24 percent and Saturday at 9 percent. Of the 35 percent of employers who checked up on an employee who called in sick, 67 percent said they required the employee to show them a doctor's note. Fifty-nine percent called the employee at home, 16 percent had another worker call the employee, and 14 percent drove by the employee's house or apartment.

While some employers are more skeptical of certain absences, others are incorporating more flexibility into their sick day programs. Sixty-nine percent of employers said they allow their team members to use sick days for mental health days.

"Employers are placing a greater emphasis on work/life balance, offering more opportunities for employees to recharge and return to the office more productive," said Rosemary Haefner, Vice President of Human Resources at CareerBuilder.com. "Your best bet is to be honest. If you're a strong employee and you're truthful about the time you need off, your employer is likely to give it to you. Lying about it, on the other hand, can have a lasting, negative impact on your credibility and job tenure."

When asked to share the most unusual excuses employees gave for missing work, employers offered the following real-life examples:

- Employee said he was crabby
- Employee got whiplash from brushing her hair
- Employee said her psychic told her to stay home or something awful would happen to her
- Employee said he wasn't feeling well and wanted to rest up for the company's holiday party that night
- Employee said her chickens' feet were frozen to the driveway
- At her sister's wedding, the employee chipped her tooth on a Mint Julep, bent over to spit it out, hit her head on a keg and was knocked unconscious with a mild concussion
- Employee claimed to have met a movie star and was spending the day with him
- Employee was injured while getting a haircut
- Employee tasted some dog food because the dog was not feeling well and now the employee is sick
- Employee's roommate locked all his clothes in a shed for spite
- A groundhog bit the employee's car tire, causing it to go flat
- Employee had been up all night because their favorite "American Idol" contestant was voted off

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the U.S. by Harris Interactive on behalf of CareerBuilder.com among

2,929 hiring managers and human resource professionals (employed full-time; not self-employed; with at least significant involvement in hiring decisions); and 5,989 U.S. employees (employed full-time; not self-employed), ages 18 and over within U.S. between August 10 and September 4, 2007. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of U.S. employers, and propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

With a pure probability sample of 2,929 and 5,989, one could say with a ninety-five percent probability that the overall results have a sampling error of +/- 2% and +/- 1.3% percentage points, respectively. Sampling error for data from sub-samples is higher and varies. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated. A full methodology is available upon request.

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Media Contact:

Jennifer Grasz

773-527-1164

Jennifer.Grasz@careerbuilder.com

First Call Analyst:

FCMN Contact:

SOURCE: CareerBuilder.com

CONTACT: Jennifer Grasz of CareerBuilder.com, +1-773-527-1164,

Jennifer.Grasz@careerbuilder.com

Web site: <http://www.careerbuilder.com/>

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