



Considerations, other than leave, for the Holiday Season

As the Christmas and New Year period approaches, employers must consider more than just managing leave and holidays. While these are crucial elements, other considerations can significantly impact your business operations and employee wellbeing during this time. Addressing these aspects proactively ensures a smooth and successful transition through the festive season. Here's what employers should keep in mind.

Supporting Employee Wellbeing During the Holiday Season

The festive season can be a joyful time, but for some employees, it can also bring stress, anxiety, and other challenges. Employers should consider what proactive steps they could take to support their teams' mental and emotional wellbeing during this period:

- **Acknowledge Stressors:** Many employees may feel pressure from increased work demands, financial concerns, or personal challenges during the holiday season. Offering a compassionate ear and creating an open-door policy can help employees feel supported.
- **Promote Work-Life Balance:** Encourage employees to take breaks, manage their workloads, and make time for non-work activities, such as with family, and for self-care. This approach

helps prevent burnout and maintains morale during a busy time.

- **Provide Access to Support Services:** Make sure employees know about any Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP) or mental health resources available. Sometimes, a reminder about available support can make a significant difference.
- **Host a Wellbeing Session:** Consider hosting a short session on managing holiday stress or mindfulness. This gesture can show that you value your employees' wellbeing, even during busy periods.

Staffing for the Holiday Rush: Options and Considerations

The Christmas and New Year period often brings changes in staffing needs. Whether it's a surge in customer demand or covering for employees on leave, getting the right mix for the cover needed is crucial, and there's some important things to remember:

- **Casual Employment Arrangements:** Casual workers are a flexible option, allowing employers to adjust staffing levels based on changing demands over the holidays. However, it's important to ensure casual employees understand that the nature of a casual arrangement means that work is irregular and there is no guarantee of a set number of hours or particular days of work. The employer can make an offer of work, when the need arises, and a casual employee can then choose whether or not to agree to do that particular period of work without repercussion. When there is agreement, the employee can expect work for the hours/days offered, and the employer can expect the casual employee to fulfil that requirement (of course assuming something unexpected and

out of the employee's control arises, such as illness, for example). Keep in mind that casuals are entitled to holiday pay at a rate of 8% of their gross earnings, and that in certain circumstances they may also be entitled to other types of leave. See the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment's employment website [here](#) for more information about when other leave entitlements may exist for a casual employee.

- **Fixed-Term Employment:** For employers needing coverage for a specific time frame, such as through December and January, fixed-term employment can be suitable. Ensure that details, such as the reason for the fixed term and in what circumstance or on what date the term will end, are clearly outlined in the employment agreement.
- **Engaging Contractors:** Contractors can be a useful solution for specific tasks or additional projects, such as undertaking maintenance, during this period. However, it's critical to correctly distinguish between employees and contractors, as misclassifying an employee as a contractor can lead to legal issues.

For further information about the different types of employment arrangements i.e. about casual, fixed term and permanent employment, including the potential issues from misclassification, see my earlier post on this topic [here](#). Click [here](#) for more information about the tests for Employee versus Contractor arrangements.

Navigating Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity

The festive season often centres around Christmas celebrations, but not all employees may celebrate or wish to participate in

Christmas-related activities. Employers should strive to create an inclusive environment that respects diverse beliefs and practices:

- **Offer Options for Celebrations:** If hosting a holiday gathering or event, ensure that participation is voluntary. Consider incorporating more inclusive language in invitations, such as referring to "end-of-year celebrations" instead of "Christmas parties."
- **Recognise Different Cultural Celebrations:** Acknowledge that some employees may celebrate other cultural or religious holidays, such as Hanukkah, Diwali, or the Lunar New Year. This recognition can be as simple as a respectful mention in a company newsletter or intranet post.

Managing Workflow and Productivity During the Holiday Season

Productivity and workflow management can become challenging during the holiday period, with some employees taking time off while others continue working. Here are strategies to maintain smooth operations:

- **Plan Early for Reduced or Increased Staffing:** Identify key projects or deadlines that fall around the holiday period and plan in advance to ensure they can be managed with reduced staffing levels. Or if it's the time of year that your business or organisation takes on additional staffing, consider plans for onboarding and how these will be delivered. In either situation, these things may involve spreading out workloads, delegating, additional training or shifting deadlines.
- **Cross-Train Staff:** Cross-training team members ensures that critical functions can continue even when some staff are away.

Do staff have procedures, desk files or documents in a Wiki, that they can refer to, to check role requirements when the usual incumbent is on leave? Cross-training staff can provide greater flexibility, reduce the pressure on any single employee, and provide development opportunities.

- **Set Clear Expectations for Remote Work:** For businesses where remote work is an option, set clear expectations around availability and productivity for employees working from home during this period. Make sure that all team members are aligned on communication methods and response times.

Preparing for the New Year: Strategic Planning and Goal Setting

The lead-up to the holiday season is also an ideal time to reflect on the past year's achievements and start planning for the next. Employers can use this time to engage with staff in planning discussions:

- **Year-End Performance Reviews:** Conducting performance reviews before the holidays can allow employees to head into the new year with a clear understanding of their goals and development areas. This timing can be a positive way to wrap up the year and start fresh in January.
- **Team Strategy Meetings:** Hold a meeting with your leadership team, department heads and staff, to review the year's successes, challenges, and focus areas for the year ahead. Engaging your team in these discussions helps to set a collaborative tone for the upcoming year.

Why Addressing These Topics Now Is Important

Discussing these considerations in October allows employers to implement changes or communicate key information well in advance of the holiday period. This early preparation helps prevent last-minute scrambles, misunderstandings, or staffing gaps during a critical time for many businesses. It also demonstrates to employees that their employer is thinking ahead and values their experience during the holiday season, which can boost engagement and morale.

Added Value: Practical Steps for Employers

- **Review Policies and Employment Agreements:** Make sure your employment agreements and company policies, particularly those relating to fixed-term and casual arrangements, are up-to-date and compliant with current legislation.
- **Ensure Payroll Systems Can Handle Changes:** Check that your payroll systems can accurately process payments for casual staff, fixed-term employees, and accounts can process contractors' invoices, as may be required during this period.
- **Conduct a Risk Assessment:** Consider conducting a risk assessment for the holiday period, covering potential staffing shortages, increased demand, or risks associated with the wellbeing of your team. This foresight helps to mitigate issues before they arise.

Do not hesitate to reach out to me if I can assist you with ensuring a well-organised, inclusive, and supportive work environment during the upcoming Christmas and New Year period and setting the foundation for a successful year ahead.

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