

## March 2020 HR Question

**Topic:** Employees requesting to stay home

**Question:** One of our peers are wondering: how is your company handling or addressing requests from employees to stay home – not because they are sick/under quarantine or have childcare issues, but because there is pressure from outside influences – family, friends, social media, to stay home?

This company is considered an Essential Services, with staff unable to work remotely or close the business. This company also wants to be mindful of the anxiety their staff is feeling during this time. If you'd open to sharing, how is your businesses balancing the needs of the employee's mental health with the needs of providing an essential service?

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### Purdy's

We are allowing people to stay at home (if not able to work from home). It is considered an unpaid leave.

### Golden Boy Foods

We are doing our best to reassure staff the additional measures we are taking to ensure the safety of our staff. If the employee is still not comfortable to come in they need to utilize their sick/vacation time before going on an unpaid LOA, however we need to have an anticipated RTW date.

### HR West

Here are some quick thoughts – A lawyer on tv last night (and it was not a corporate lawyer but a lawyer representing employees) told people to be cautious as if you are in an essential service and your employer is taking all the required precautions and you refuse you are subject to dismissal. However, assuming you want a more proactive/encouraging approach:

- There is a Leave of Absence code on ROEs (N)
  - <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/ei/ei-list/reports/roe-guide/instructions.html#block16>
- If the whole plant is not demanding this "my family wants me to" leave, then the employer should consider using this code
  - This type of leave does not qualify for EI payments
    - No EI payments, no \$1000 top up
      - Suspect this is a notable portion of the "my family wants me to" type people
  - The person is not laid off (code A) or illness/sick (code D)
- The zero income/zero EI/zero EI top-up should encourage some people to not plan this route

- Plants have to realize that they need to be proactive
  - The grocery store approach (\$2.00 per hour) has an impact on the labour market
    - Doesn't have to be \$2.00, but it has to be something
  - If you have an EAP refer them to it to talk to someone – you might consider doing an ad hoc session for them with a counsellor if you don't have a program
  - Have people believe they are at work for more than just corporate reasons
    - They are literally feeding their neighbours
    - Love this article: <https://business.financialpost.com/news/retail-marketing/serving-your-country-inside-the-push-to-keep-kraft-dinner-on-the-shelves-amid-coronavirus-panic-buying>
      - People always want to know they are doing something bigger; this has to be more true now than ever
        - Tell them that – at least once a day (and mean it)
  - Health measures
    - Remind them of everything you are doing and refer it back to public directives – you are making it safe for them
    - Great signage coming into the plant (Let your supervisor know if...)
    - I have one plant and know of others that are taking everyone's temperature as they start work
      - Employees appreciate it
        - <http://lawofwork.ca/temperature-screening-for-the-coronavirus-necessary-but-not-sufficient/>
          - Don't keep data

From an HR perspective, I think treating those with "my family doesn't want me to" folks as anomalies is the most prudent. Make it clear to them that they are on an unpaid leave of absence and are not likely to receive EI (they are not laid off (we need you to work) and they are not sick ("my family doesn't want me to" is not a disability)); this clarity will likely reduce the number of people going down this path and may discourage others from seeking that path.

### Canature

It's a challenge. We do our best to make our workplace safe and do everything barring the virus spreading. At the same time, we think the most important thing is to make our employees FEEL comfortable working with us in this special period, make them feel safe in the workplace, otherwise legally they may and can refuse to work and stay home. The things we are doing, for example, stop all customer & supplier visiting, request logistic suppliers to provide non-contact delivering services, sanitize workplace everyday/each use, employees must wear masks in the workplace (company provided), all employees have covid-19 similar symptom must stay at home, etc. So doing these, we're fine until now. Employees do have lots of concern and anxiety during this period. Basically, they are supporting and cooperating, but I don't know when things go worse and worse how long this situation will last.



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## Red Dog Deli

We had a few employees that were feeling pressure from outside influences. We did a group discussion with the whole team, explained how transmission works, why some workplaces are being shut down while others remain open (i.e. that restaurants and other places that have high access to public are higher risk while manufacturing facilities that exercise lots of precautions are low risk). Then we explained what essential means and how it would impact everyone including them if all essential personnel decided to stay home. We explained about the curve and that the goal of measures is to slow things down while still maintaining life that is as normal as possible for everyone to make it easier on the recovery later.

And then we offered individual sessions to each person who still had concerns. And that if individuals were still really feeling stressed, they were welcome to take vacation leave (but they would not be eligible for EI).

We found that having regular meetings to get everyone to understand the balance and why we had to stay open as an essential service calmed everyone enough.