

Handling Special Requests

Principles: Each employee is unique with individual needs and circumstances, which may constantly change. Treating employees fairly does not mean that their needs will be treated exactly the same way in all cases. **Each unique situation must be addressed based on the specifics of that situation and in a manner consistent with the applicable principles.**

Background: Because employees are people with unique needs and circumstances, supervisors will occasionally be faced with requests from employees to exempt them from normal work rules or policies. Such situations will require the best of the supervisor's problem-solving abilities. As the supervisor responds to the employee, it must be clear that the response will set precedent for supervisors to follow in similar situations in the future.

Procedures: When an employee makes a special request, the first thing to do is ensure that you have a clear understanding of the employee's need and the request the employee is making of you and the company to address that need. You should restate your understanding to the employee in your own words so that the employee can confirm or correct your understanding of the situation and the request.

It is usually wise to avoid a quick response to requests for exceptions or special handling. Responding without careful consideration can lead to poor decisions and precedents that are difficult to live with in the future.

Your first source of possible answers is the Employee Handbook. You should list the possible options to address the employee's need that are not exceptions to rules or policies. Try to find a solution that fits entirely within current policy and practice. In doing so, you should involve your manager and other supervisors. They may have additional insight and they will have to live with the precedent you would set by making an exception, so you should allow them to help you find a way to accommodate the request without making an exception, if possible.

If there is no way to accommodate the employee's need without an exception to current policy and practice, you must decide whether it is worth it to meet the employee's need or not. Sometimes the answer must be "I am sorry, but we can't accommodate your request."

If you decide that accommodating the employee's need justifies an exception to policy or practice, look for ways to do so without violating stated principles. For example, <Your Company>'s stated principle is that employees be at work "on time every day they are scheduled for work," and we promise to support employee's in developing their professional skills. An employee wants to take a course in a degree program that is only offered during normal work hours. Attending this class will make the employee one hour late for work three days per week.

A possible solution would be to change the employee's scheduled work time on class days to begin and end one hour later than usual. This exception will keep both principles intact. Another option would be to grant the employee one hour of vacation each day he will be late due to the class. This solution might violate a normal practice of requiring vacation to be taken in at least half-day increments but will keep the applicable principles intact.

When dealing with requests for leave of absence or other situations that may involve legal compliance, you must discuss the request and gain concurrence for your solution from senior management at the company and possibly from legal counsel prior to responding to the employee.