

MDS Alert

Staff and Scheduling: Ascertain Holiday Schedules Early

Hint: Scheduling the year's holidays can go a long way toward staffing holidays equitably between employees.

Everyone in healthcare knows that there are no real holidays, but smart and compassionate managers know that their staff deserve time with family. Figuring out how to schedule holiday work so that residents get the care they need and staff get a chance at work/life balance is tricky but doable.

Instead of scheduling on a holiday-by-holiday basis, put everything on the table at once. Start scheduling next year's holidays now - include the major holidays, like Thanksgiving, but include minor holidays like Valentine's Day, too.

"Different employees consider different holidays more important. Some prefer New Year's Eve over New Year's Day. While others love travelling for Thanksgiving, some feel Christmas with family [is] sacred. Knowing your employees and their families, you can allow employees to choose which holiday is more important to spend at home," says **TrackSmart**, a company focused on simplifying human resources management through software and ideas for employee scheduling and attendance, on their blog.

With so much turnover in the long-term care industry at large, scheduling a year out may feel crazy, but you can at least make sure that your anchor staff are set.

However, try not to fall into the trap of allowing long-term employees to claim the same holidays every year. "If newer employees sense that senior employees always get the choice holiday schedule, they may not be as willing to cooperate with your needs," TrackSmart says.

You can mitigate tension around holiday scheduling woes by taking the days surrounding the holiday into account. For example, if an employee has a lifelong family tradition of attending a church service on Christmas Eve, but has a low-key Christmas Day, adjust your schedules so that she can take off Dec. 23 and 24 but works Dec. 25. This may free up a young parent whose kids are old enough to know which morning Santa is supposed to drop by - and maybe she'll be so grateful to have Dec. 25 to spend with her family that she'll gladly work Dec. 26-31.

"If someone can't do Christmas on the 25th, they may still be happy to celebrate the 26th. Not everyone celebrates Christmas religiously these days, so consider prioritizing someone you know wants off on religious grounds," TrackSmart says.

Whatever you decide, make the policy official by communicating it broadly. "Broadcast how you decide widely and don't let it be a surprise. If you always prefer to honor religious commitments, make that known beforehand," TrackSmart says.

Plus, clarity, transparency, and consistency can help emphasize the "all hands on deck" attitude and work culture that long-term care requires of its staff, as well as help alleviate any tension for employees who don't get their first pick of holiday vacation days.