

World Cup warning... thinking of throwing a "sickie" or turning up to work with a hangover? You may want to think again

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The charity Drinkaware has recently conducted a poll which shows that nearly 1 in 10 employees (almost half a million people) arrive at work at least twice a week suffering with the effect of too much alcohol. And of those that are hungover, almost 1 in 5 admit struggling with their workload and making mistakes.

With the World Cup looming, there will doubtless be further flowing alcohol consumption, together with the likelihood of some individuals reporting in sick on days where England coincidentally are playing one of their matches in South Africa. During previous world cup tournaments, not least when England were playing Argentina on a Friday lunchtime, a reported 2.5 million workers called in "sick". The precedent is clearly set.

So what are the repercussions for the individual if they turn up with a hangover in the workplace, or throw a "sickie" and don't turn up at all? Firstly the hangover. At its worst, this can amount to gross misconduct especially if it impacts on your or your colleagues' productivity. If you are in a position of responsibility especially, you simply cannot turn up for work with an impaired mind. A negligent decision can cost your employers dearly either in lost revenue or clients. Even if you do not hold a position of responsibility, turning up at work with a hangover will be frowned upon. In most cases, a warning would be issued under the employer's disciplinary process, but this will almost certainly be escalated for repeated offences.

Many employers will have an alcohol policy in their terms and conditions which will set out what is acceptable.

What about throwing a "sickie" to watch that all important England match? This throws up many interesting issues both from the employer and the employee's perspective. Unless there is a genuine sickness, lying to your boss could amount to gross misconduct. Of course for one day's illness, your boss could never prove that you were in fact well enough to come to work-especially if you are well versed at feigning an ill voice over the phone. But the risk is there for you nevertheless especially if the intention is to slope off to a public place or to comment on the match via Facebook or Twitter – all of which can easily come to your employer's attention. If you don't want to take your chances, you would be better off taking it as a day's holiday or offering to make up the time spent at non-England playing days.

For employers (many of whom will doubtless be just as keen to follow England's matches), they need to tread carefully if they are going to be lenient towards their staff. If they allow supporters of England time off to support the national team (either by setting up a screen in the office or otherwise), then they similarly should be allowing non-English supporters the right to time off to support their own national team. They also risk sex discrimination allegations if they allow male workers longer breaks to support the team but fail to extend the right to female workers on the basis that they are not interested.

In the end, there is likely to be the usual hotchpotch of "good and bad employers" – the good with the more lenient and open approach and the bad failing to extend any latitude. This can also be narrowed down to the make-up of your boss. A boss who is not a keen follower of football is clearly going to have less leniency.

I hope that common sense prevails. If England reach the final stages of the competition, it would be a sour employer indeed who failed to extend to their staff through flexible working or otherwise, the ability to support the team. It's only once every 4 years after all.

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