



April, 2010 - How to Fill the Gaps

Filling the gaps

Seems like more people are taking leaves recently. Could be the up tick in the economy, an improving business outlook, or just because it's Spring. Whatever the cause, ProBusS has been busy covering for employees who are on leaves because of illness, surgery, recovery, or family emergencies. It's like vacation coverage, but often with less notice.

Recently, for example, a customer asked us to provide staff to cover for two electricians who were taking leave under the **Family and Medical Leave Act**. Neither electrician knew the other was planning a leave, and the simultaneously departure was a problem. Until ProBusS electricians stepped in.

ProBusS has provided staff coverage for leaves, vacations, and other staff shortages for electricians, millwrights, machine repairmen, preventative maintenance technicians, and other workers. With vacation months around the corner, we thought a short discussion about covering for missing staff would make a nice topic for a newsletter, and offer **a few ideas on filling the gaps in production and manufacturing staff.**



Take a leave... quiz

ProBusS recently provided coverage for workers going on FMLA leaves, so we did a little research and found out some interesting things about FMLA that you might like to know. Test your knowledge of FMLA with this quick quiz:

1. What percentage of workers qualify to take leave under FMLA?
 - a) 32%
 - b) 48%
 - c) 62%
 - d) Everybody but you.
2. How many people in the U.S. have taken FMLA leaves?
 - a) 19 million
 - b) 33 million
 - c) 50 million
 - d) Almost as many as watch "Dancing With The Stars"
- 3) What's the top reason people take FMLA leave?
 - a) To care for a new child
 - b) To care for a seriously ill family member
 - c) To care for their own serious illness
 - d) To catch the opening day of trout season
- 4) The U.S. government mandates employers provide how much paid annual leave to their employees:
 - a) one week
 - b) two weeks
 - c) none
 - c) three weeks
- 5) How many workers take a FMLA leave of 40 days or fewer?
 - a) 10%
 - b) 25%
 - c) 80%
 - d) FMLA leaves have to be 30 days or less



How did you do?

The correct answer in each case is: c). That's according to the U.S. Dept. of Labor, and the Project on Global Working Families.

But the big question is this: **are you well prepared and ready to absences by key employees?** Even vacations can leave you shorthanded. With fewer people on staff and restrictions on overtime, it's sometimes tough to keep operations as well staffed as we'd like. Vacations, sick time, and other absences always seem to happen at the worst times.

Keep reading for some ideas on how to keep your operation at full throttle...

Prepare for departure

Some things you can do to plan for and handle employee absences, whether FMLA, vacation, sick time -any situation that causes you to lose staff for awhile.

1. **Cross train staff** so they can cover when someone leaves for a short time. This helps ensure the plant runs smoothly even when critical workers are out. It's also fair: no one wants to take a vacation and then return, for example, to a stack of work orders that piled up while they were gone.

2. **Use incentives in planning vacations.** If your operation has busy and slow times, consider offering incentives for employees to take leaves and vacations during slack times. With a point system, for example, employees are awarded a certain number of points toward time off. During slow time, a day off costs one point. When business is busy, it costs two.

3. **Keep it equitable.** Track who gets time off and when. If someone pulls the less-than-great vacation time this year, give them first crack at next year's best times.

4. **Understand FMLA.** How much notice are employees required to provide before a leave? Who's eligible on your staff to take a FMLA leave?

5. **Keep preventative maintenance programs up to date.** Don't expect, for example, that staff who routinely work one machine will know another machine and its needs for lubrication, maintenance, etc.

6. **Know who to call** for top notch skilled trades and other plant personnel: that would be... ProBusS!

We have millwrights, electricians, plumbers, machine repairmen, project managers, preventative maintenance technicians, and general labor who can step in at a moment's notice and help you cover a FMLA leave, or vacations, sick time, any time you're short-staffed and need a hand.



And by the way, **ProBusS can provide coverage for any length of time**, from a day to, well, as long as you need.

It's time we show the team photo. Maybe it's time to put the ProBusS team to work for you?



How to leverage short-term help

Four tips for making the most of your short term skilled trades staff:

1. Have a written **description of the work** you want performed. Clear direction is the first start toward great results. Often this is a blueprint, schematic, or other printed document.
2. For a temporary worker who's filling in for a staff person, **provide a mentor**. A full-time employee who can show the new guy around, answer questions, and make introductions.
3. **Plan in advance** exactly what projects or machines you need staffed, repaired, moved, etc.
4. **Check in regularly** with your short term staffer, or project manager, during the first hour or so. Making sure the work is off to a good start helps prevent misunderstandings and mistakes later on.