

Qualification: CIPD Diploma in Applied Human Resources

Module Name: Understanding the Management of Employment
Relations

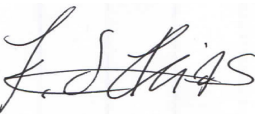
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Signed: 

Date: 09 June 2020

Understanding the Management of Employment Relations

On the Job training assignment

At the start of the pandemic, we at E-cigarette Direct struggled to keep our retail shops open and/or adequately staffed due to staff being unwell or having to self-isolate. This also impacted HR workload due to having to review and submit accurate information on SSP and Company sick pay for March payroll, due to the high absence levels along with the fact that the government changed the qualifying days (GOV.UK, 2020). The increase in email queries and submissions of Self Isolation notes also kept the HR team very busy.

Following the announcement of lockdown on the 23 March the business needed to quickly organise the closure of our 20 retail stores. Staff for each store were contacted and sent instructions to work in-store on the 24th of March in order to safely 'close down' (Carwright, 2020).

I personally researched and drafted suitable template letters based on guidance from the Federation of Small Business (FSB) legal hub (FSB, 2020) and other organisations as to whether we needed employee consent to furlough (Barnett, 2020). The HR team quickly processed letters and organised the furlough of 42% of our workforce following the store closures on 25th March. We later furloughed a further 3%, once admin and close-downs had been fully completed (Ecigarette Direct, 2020a).

Company Web sales have grown exponentially, up 350% since the start of the pandemic (Nelsey, 2020), putting a strain on the warehouse and customer service staff. We, therefore, decided to offer some of our retail staff in the locality the opportunity, after 3 weeks on furlough, to work in our warehouse/customer service teams. The benefits of this decision over hiring (externally, which we also did due to the incredible increase in demand) is that they already have the product knowledge skills, therefore, training time was greatly reduced.

All non-essential head office staff, approximately 60%, were asked to work from home. HR and the IT team worked hard to supply staff with adequate equipment to set up secure networks and access to internal systems from home. We have a duty of care to our employees to protect them from the health risks of working with display screen equipment (DSE), as per The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (legislation.gov.uk, no date), applies to workers who use DSE daily. As all our home workers just DSE for prolonged periods I have organised a DSE assessment form to be sent to all employees working from home to ensure they are comfortable and have the right equipment in order to work from home safely. The Health & Safety Executive (HSE, 2020) outlines the risks for lone workers with no direct supervision and details that if contact with remote workers is poor they can feel isolated which can have an adverse effect on stress levels and mental health. In line with HSE advice, we ensure that there is regular communication with home workers from HR and line managers to make sure they are healthy and safe. Meetings are being held over video conferencing and we have also set up weekly coffee mornings to check in with staff to see how they are doing on an informal and social level. We continue to send out the Company newsletter via email to all employees, even those on furlough so they can still find out what's going on and to let them know of any future plans. Furloughed employees can still contact HR, or our Head of Retail with questions or concerns (Churchill, 2020, p.8).

We are planning a phased re-opening of our English stores and have therefore drafted a return to work questionnaire for employees, in order to gauge the mood and address any concerns staff may have. Everett (2020) believes that in order to ensure a safe transition back into work employers need to include a clear training plan and wellbeing support system. In line with this, we have arranged a full training programme for the first wave of employees returning to work, which includes health and safety refresher training with specific COVID19 training amongst other programmes. We are and have always been committed to the welfare, safety and wellbeing of all our colleagues and therefore have created a dedicated Coronavirus intranet page which includes health, safety and wellbeing guidance for all employees (Ecigarette Direct, 2020b).

For the longer-term, we are looking at a blended approach to home/office working (Everett, 2020) as we anticipate head office staff requesting to work from home more or permanently following the pandemic and therefore need to review our current policies.

An employee in our Head Office has been given responsibility as a 'Social Distancing Officer' to maintain social distancing rules. Additional PPE has been made available for all staff who wish to use it and also for first aiders and fire marshals for use in any incidents. Training on how to safely use and dispose of the PPE has been given. Three weekly COVID meetings are being held in head office to provide any updates to processes/procedures in line with updated Government guidance.

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