



Expert Time and Attendance

3 Ways for Great Managers to Shine

Summary

Strategic time and attendance decision making is one of the best ways managers can demonstrate their value and expertise. While the past demanded that managers create do-it-yourself time and attendance tools, advances in Cloud-based applications automate basic aspects of time and attendance while providing managers unprecedented information access for better decision making. So why do some managers persist in relying on DIY tools? This white paper examines common reasons why some managers stick with spreadsheet applications instead of taking advantage of automated time and attendance tools, problems spreadsheets cause with time and attendance tasks, and the three key areas in which time and attendance tools can help managers shine.

Time and Attendance — The Manager's Opportunity

A good manager is the hub of the department. This manager knows how to be responsive, motivate employees, keep them productive — and keep the department profitable. That's why time and attendance tasks are opportunities for managers to showcase their expertise. From scheduling to labor budgets to reporting, a valuable manager ensures the smooth operation of the department through strategic time and attendance decisions. So how are great managers able to step back and make those decisions? With the help of time and attendance tools.

The Past: DIY Time and Attendance Tools

Not so long ago, many managers had to create their own time and attendance tools by retrofitting software applications to their needs. Creatively, they developed intricate spreadsheets to help them build department schedules, establish and manager labor budgets, and even run reports. It was a do-it-yourself solution, albeit a time-consuming and error-prone one, but those trailblazing managers made it work.

Today, cloud-based applications give managers a leg up. Instead of relying on spreadsheet cells and formulas, managers can take advantage of tools in their time and attendance system developed specifically for their needs. This new flexibility and responsiveness can be attributed to a vendor's ability to quickly update cloud-based applications and add features demanded by the market more easily than in the days of desktop software.

But the reality is that many managers are still relying on their DIY tools. It's true that applications like Excel play an important role in time and attendance, but it's an increasingly minor one as time and attendance systems fine-tune their tools to give managers access to real-time information for strategic decision making.

Why Do Some Managers Stick with Spreadsheets?

If applications like Excel don't readily showcase a manager's time and attendance expertise, why are some managers still using it? There are three common reasons:

- ***That's the way they've always done it.***

Any way you look at it, creating a time-and-attendance-task spreadsheet is a time-consuming process. Some managers spend time up front populating cells with formulas to automatically update when new data is added. Others use the spreadsheet as a data storage space, importing new information each pay period and doing much of the calculation by hand. Because managers invested the time to create and refine such spreadsheets to meet their needs, they trust their calculations and find satisfaction in influencing an outcome rather than relying on a system that operates by a strict set of rules. Consequently, they are reluctant to shift to a new system—even if it offers new ways for them to demonstrate their value.

- ***They've been unable to find a system that meets their needs.***

Until the recent growth in cloud-based applications, managers struggled with unresponsive time and attendance systems featuring tools not designed for their needs. In the past, many vendors took a one-size-fits-all approach to application development and generally focused on the needs of enterprise organizations. This left managers at medium, small and "specialty" organizations to find other ways to address their time and attendance challenges.



- ***They're worried they'll be replaced.***
Some managers feel that tools designed to assist or automate basic managerial tasks will eliminate this crucial part of their responsibility — and potentially their entire job. However, today's managers understand their value lies in their ability to make strategic decisions that keep their departments operating optimally, making any tool that helps them one to embrace.

The Spreadsheet: Pitfalls and Problems

If the only issue with retrofitting applications for time and attendance tasks is that it doesn't put managers' true expertise on display, is it really a concern? Yes, since relying on spreadsheets introduces other issues, including:

- ***No checks/balances.***
Because spreadsheets rely so heavily on the manager to configure them, this manual configuration can be error-prone. Errors unwittingly introduced by the manager can affect scheduling decisions for months or years until the error is stumbled upon by the manager—or a colleague. No automatic checks and balances are built-in to ensure the spreadsheet reflects the most accurate information for scheduling decision making... unless a manager builds it in.
- ***No change tracking.***
If time and attendance data is changed in a spreadsheet application, these changes are not tracked and logged. This means it is nearly impossible to ensure that past data is completely accurate, which is especially problematic in the face of litigation such as wage and hour non-compliance allegations.
- ***No punch-to-paycheck automation.***
Spreadsheets are unable to provide real-time attendance information, allowing only for reporting at the end of a pay period. This significantly limits the manager's ability to adjust or correct an employee's schedule in the midst of a pay period — an essential task for managers aiming to optimize their department schedule and maximize productivity and profitability.
- ***No built-in scheduling features or tools.***
Most multipurpose applications do not provide tools or functions specific to time and attendance tasks. This means the manager is totally responsible for all administrative aspects of time and attendance tasks, such as ensuring the employee roster is accurate or tallying payroll or monthly labor cost projections correctly. Many time and attendance systems feature tools that handle this administrative burden, demonstrating that a manager's value lies not in the ability to accurately configure an application but rather in the ability to make strategic decisions based on the information presented.
- ***No integration with payroll, time and attendance or HR.***
The value of integrating scheduling with payroll, time and attendance and HR systems is apparent. Without this ability, DIY spreadsheets place excessive demands on a manager's time and organization to manage time and attendance tasks. For instance, a manager actively monitoring employees who work overtime will need to consult and compare information from two disparate applications (the spreadsheet application and the payroll system)—a process made considerably easier if the applications are integrated.

Ultimately, issues with DIY time and attendance solutions boil down to two factors: time and accuracy. The DIY solution demands high levels of both from managers, forcing them to focus on administrative details instead of higher (and more valuable) strategic decision making.

3 Ways Time and Attendance Tools Help Managers Shine

Time and attendance tools highlight managers' skills. How? By providing useful oversight capabilities, integrating with relevant systems and automating administrative aspects of their time and attendance process in three key tasks: scheduling, managing labor budgets and reporting.

Scheduling

Scheduling is a key task for managers. Great managers know to focus on the strategic aspects of scheduling such as ensuring shift team compatibility and productivity, maintaining labor budgets and staying responsive to leave requests and scheduling changes.

Scheduling tools in a useful time and attendance system will:

- automate basic administrative tasks (such as automatically populating the scheduling tool with an up-to-date department roster).
- calculate employee and department totals (whether in hours or dollars).
- allow managers to easily edit the schedule with last-minute changes or leave requests, requiring the system to be integrated with HR and payroll for maximum flexibility.

Labor Ratios and Budgets

Labor ratios and budgets are important ways to optimize scheduling and manage costs. While some industries such as healthcare have established and regulated ways to calculate how many employees needed per shift, labor ratios can help any organization find the sweet spot where profitability and productivity meet. Once established, a labor ratio will inform an organization's labor budget.

When it comes to labor ratios and budgets, managers are where the rubber meets the road. Time and attendance systems that integrate labor ratios and budgets into their scheduling and reporting tools allow managers to effectively meet and maintain these measures to keep the organization operating at its peak.

Reporting

Great managers know reporting is an important way to assess what's working and where opportunities exist. Reporting helps managers identify trends (in labor, scheduling, overtime and other related areas), conduct audits (in the case of wage and hour disputes), and demonstrate progress (such as the viability of a new shift, scheduling strategy, or labor investment).

A time and attendance system's reporting tools must be flexible and straightforward for managers to make the most of them. Running standard reports using existing and customizable templates must be easy, but a manager also needs the ability to export time and attendance data into other applications (such as Excel) for ad hoc reporting as needed.



In addition, any changes made to historical data will be tracked and logged by the system, ensuring it remains accurate and tamper-proof. Time and attendance systems provide historical audit trails so that any change a manager makes to time cards, schedules and even employee personal information is logged and can be viewed in reports in the event of a dispute or review.

Conclusion

A manager's strength and value is found in both expertise and experience. Time and attendance tools help managers make the best of their talents in three key areas: scheduling, labor budgets and ratios, and reporting. Instead of forcing managers to worry about administrative accuracy, these tools allow managers to use real-time time and attendance data to make confident, strategic labor decisions. Time and attendance tools ensure great managers can continue to capitalize on their skills and offer value to their organizations.