

Super Bowl 51: What to Do When Fantasy is Over and Football Fever Becomes Work Reality?

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Super Bowl LI is just around the corner, and many of your employees probably already have *football fever*. According to a January 2016 study conducted by the Workforce Institute at Kronos, 77 percent of American workers planned to watch Super Bowl 50. So whether they are cheering for the Patriot's ninth Super Bowl appearance, the halftime show, or the much-talked-about commercials, it's a safe bet that most of your employees will tune in to at least part of the game day programming. Here are some issues employers may want to consider as they brace themselves for game day fumbles:

1. The fantasy football pool.

Gambling is still illegal in most jurisdictions—even at work and even when it's just over football. Federal law and most state laws prohibit gambling: the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act of 1992 prohibits gambling on sports in most states, and the Interstate Wire Act of 1961 has been interpreted to prohibit online betting. In some states, gambling is a misdemeanor. However, in others, while gambling is generally prohibited, gambling at work may be considered an exception under certain circumstances. Nevertheless, it's expected that millions of workers will participate in office pools related to the Super Bowl.

Employers may want to take this opportunity to clearly delineate their policies and communicate these policies to employees. To eliminate any confusion, employers may want to relay the state law on gambling to employees and define exactly which acts are covered under the law.

2. A widespread case of the Mondays.

If your Super Bowl party goes as it should, you and your guests might have a little more Monday angst than usual. The 2016 Workforce Institute study suggested that one in 10 workers (approximately 16.5 million U.S. employees) were expected to miss work on the Monday after Super Bowl 50 and that almost 10.5 million employees had requested that Monday off.

Is there anything employers can do to curb employees' absences on Monday? Two initial considerations when managing employee sick time requests are: (1) whether the employee has sick time available; and (2) whether the employer's sick time policies are enforced uniformly and all employees are treated equally in terms of their requests.

Employers might be able to decrease the likelihood of employees failing to come in on Monday and create morale-building opportunities by taking some proactive steps. For example, an employer could plan a celebratory work event on the Monday after Super Bowl Sunday. Employees will be itching to talk about the ins and outs of the game and the hot new commercials anyway—they may as well do it around a football-shaped cake while wearing their favorite team's jersey.

3. Online instant replays.

Employees are not just watching games online; they are also streaming them on social media platforms. Last year, Twitter started carrying live streams of professional football games both on its site and on its app. In 2015, Facebook launched a Super Bowl news feed consisting of a live feed, photos and videos from media outlets, posts from users' "friends," live scores, and other ways to interact within the Facebook community. As employees watch games online and on apps, in addition to using the company's email to communicate, companies might experience performance degradation in their computer networks.

This is a good time to remind employees of your company's Internet use policies as well as any policy on the appropriate use of company-issued devices such as smartphones and tablets. Whichever course employers take, they should be sure to enforce their technology policies uniformly.

With a little foresight and planning—and a few carefully implemented policies—employers can avoid the blitz when it comes to the Super Bowl and workplace productivity.

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