

THEFT IN THE WORKPLACE

Labour relations *(continues)*

Definition of theft

Is when someone unlawfully and intentionally appropriates someone else's movable, physical property. This includes the intention to permanently deprive the owner of his/her property.

Theft in the workplace is when an employee takes company or other employee item or goods which he has no lawful right to, with the intention of permanently keeping the item or goods to use or sell for any other purpose.

Every employer will probably, at some stage or another, be faced with theft in its workplace. Due to the fact that theft is a dishonesty offence, those employees found guilty of theft are in most cases dismissed, no matter the value of the item stolen and in most cases, factors in mitigation were not enough to tip the scale away from dismissal, as honesty goes to the heart of the relationship and theft or dishonesty destroys the trust between employers and employees.

Employees have a duty to report theft.

If you hold a position of authority and know or ought reasonably to have known or suspected that any other person has committed an act of theft or any other form of misconduct, you must report this knowledge or suspicion to the employer or relevant authorities. Failure to comply with this duty is a punishable offence.

Whistle-blowing

This will prevent employees being identified and victimized by colleagues and fellow employees as the snitch. The institution is supposed to have a good whistle-blowing policy and guidelines of how to report incidences of theft and others. One of the cornerstones of a good whistle-blowing policy is anonymity to ensure that honest employees are protected.

An employee who doesn't report theft can be disciplined.

The employer can discipline and even dismiss an employee who fails to report either a particular incident or a general trend of misconduct by other employees. Employees should be alerted that they can be found guilty of "derivative misconduct". Employees also owe the company a duty of care and loyalty.

To find an employee guilty of derivative misconduct, the employer must be able to show two things:

1. The employee knew about the incident or the misconduct other employees were committing. Or, you might be in a position to argue that the employee must have known or could reasonably have acquired knowledge.

2. The employee failed to report what he knew without having a good reason for not reporting it.

These principles were confirmed recently in an arbitration hearing between SATAWU and Jedidja Couriers, where the dismissal of an employee was confirmed that he knew about the misconduct but failed to alert the employer.

The employer may need to rely on the doctrine to enforce workplace rules because there's a lack of co-operation from employees who are aware of wrongdoing and thus a difficulty in identifying culprits. A wall of silence or active resistance to co-operating with the employer isn't acceptable and if the employer meet this problem, can take action.

Employees have a general obligation to act in the best interests of the institution. This includes reporting wrongdoing. However, failure to report any wrongdoing of which an employee may be aware doesn't necessarily mean the employee is colluding with the wrongdoer.

The municipality expects a high degree of co-operation from employees in trying to catch and get rid of thieves. It will also need to reinforce a position by instituting a rule in the workplace that obliges employees to report wrongdoing or suspicious conduct by employees.

How to deal with theft?

To deal effectively with theft, you have to follow an approach which clearly communicates that crime doesn't pay. The municipality will enforce an approach of zero tolerance to dishonestly through the following:

- Instituting criminal charges against whoever is caught stealing or taking part in the process.
- Make a proper example of culprits to get zero tolerance messages across.
- Protect your whistle-blowers.

10 red flags to detect employees committing theft

1. An excessive /expensive lifestyle with high living costs which don't compare to the salary they earn.
2. An employee who constantly claims he's underpaid.
3. A close relationship with suppliers.
4. A poor credit history or the number of garnishee orders you deduct from the employee.
5. He never takes leave (employee who regularly steal are quite protective over their domain. They're reluctant to go on leave because their substitute's normally then pick up inconsistencies and report them to management).
6. Refusal of a promotion.
7. Excessive and unexplained overtime.
8. Numbers that just don't add up, i.e. a sudden dramatic decline in profits, for no apparent reason.
9. Gambling, alcohol or drug problems.
10. Never being able to make ends meet despite your projections telling you otherwise.

Rate payers' convenience going VIP



Recently, Sekhukhune District Municipality has launched its West Street Office into a highly effective pay point for rate payers. This follows the Sekhukhune District Council's decision to take over the water and sewer bills from Elias Motsoaledi and Ephraim Mogale Local Municipalities. The pay point at No 3 West Street Groblersdal became the single epicenter for customer convenience where all payments are made and all queries are resolved expediently.

It all began weeks before the month of July 2014 when Municipal Manager Mme M.F Mokoko issued a public notice to all affected residents. By the 1st of July 2014 residents of Elias Motsoaledi were streaming the West Street offices at a daily recorded footprint of 45 persons a day. The foot traffic has increased since the all water related services were included from water and sewer bills, to connection, disconnection and allied services delivered through Sekhukhune District Municipality.

According to the District's team entrusted with Cost Recovery Ms Busisiwe Matjie customers may also pay through the Sekhukhune District Municipality's banking details and call the extension for billing services.

Matjie explained that the banking details for the Standard Bank account held by Sekhukhune District Municipality is account number 271149418 at Groblersdal Branch with Branch Code 052647. The contact details of the billing services are 013 262 7300/ extension 7680.