

# Create empowering leave experiences

HR's guide to supporting employees before,  
during and after time away

**unum**<sup>®</sup>



## CONTENTS

Why empathy matters	03
Best practice 1: Clarity beforehand	04
Best practice 2: Leave requests	05
Best practice 3: Preparing for the leave	06
Best practice 4: While they're away	07
Best practice 5: The return to work and beyond	08
An example: Jessica's maternity leave journey	09
Our HR-meets-tech solutions	10



## A HUMAN APPROACH

# Empathy during life's biggest moments

## A human-centered approach makes a difference

Employees typically take a leave of absence during life's biggest moments. Whether they're feeling the pain and stress of an injury or excitement for a new baby, your employees need the leave process to be as easy as possible (and so does your HR department).

**Most organizations have leave programs and policies in place, but how employees are treated through the process matters.**

While leave administration may be "old hat" for HR professionals, it's a rare occurrence for most workers, and it requires empathy and patience. Employees can feel overwhelmed by the process and don't know where to begin, or they feel a stigma about taking leave in the first place.

## Keep employees engaged

Employees are the life of every company. Without them, our organizations can't function. A leave of absence is a pivotal point in an employee's career:



**A good experience** can help a person feel rejuvenated and like an engaged, valued teammate.



**A bad experience** can make folks feel like another cog in a machine, or even forgotten.

Following these best practices will help your employees feel safe, informed and in control of their time away.



**88%**  
of employees are willing to stay with an employer that emphasizes their needs<sup>1</sup>

## BEST PRACTICE ONE

# Create clarity before the leave

## Self-serve technology adds transparency and confidentiality

### Confidentiality is key

Employees often take leave for highly personal reasons. Online self-service planning and education tools help maintain confidentiality while they plan their leave. By having these tools available, employees can start planning earlier, which often leads to them notifying their employers sooner. Make sure your company's policies and benefits are easy for employees to find.

### Autonomy is empowering

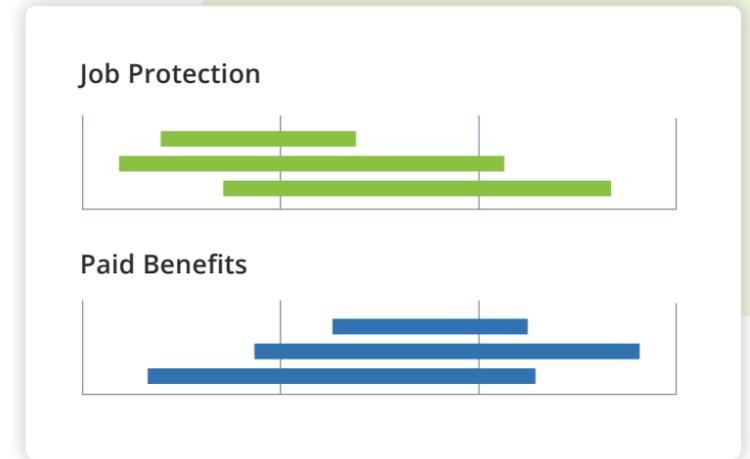
Providing digital self-service tools is the easiest way to empower your employees. A self-serve model lets a person find the information they need, understand the benefits available to them and anticipate their pay and predicted timelines.

### Communication enhances understanding

Few people outside of HR understand how short term disability benefits flow with family and medical leave, state leave and your corporate leave plans. Offering digital planning tools with visuals like color-coded timelines and calendars helps show your employees how benefits and different types of leave work together and when each one starts and ends while a resource library supports their broader benefits education.

### Job and income protections give peace of mind

Employees planning a leave need reassurance in several areas: job protection and pay being the top two. Ensure your employees have a crystal-clear view of which benefits provide what protections and when.



## Leave planning tools help employees gain clarity on:

- Your leave policies
- How to plan a leave
- Benefits available and which ones apply to their situation
- The time they can take off
- Their pay during leave
- How different leave types work together
- What information or documents they need to provide and when

## BEST PRACTICE TWO

# Streamline leave requests

For your employees, dealing with leave can be complicated and confusing. Here are some questions to help you evaluate if your company's processes make requesting a leave feel accessible:

### ❓ How do employees submit a request for leave and file a claim?

Best practice: It should be simple and intuitive. Ideally, the process would take less than 15 minutes.

---

### ❓ Can they request leave digitally and securely?

Best practice: Employees should be able to use their own device to request leave and upload their documents in a user-friendly interface.

---

### ❓ Does the system use legal or HR jargon?

Best practice: Most people don't know the difference between PFML, FMLA, ADA or other "alphabet soup" — say things simply.

### ❓ When someone requests leave, are the next steps apparent?

Best practice: Employees should know when to expect a response, how they'll be notified and how to check the progress of their claim at any time.

---

### ❓ Does your company's system integrate the employees' supplemental benefits (e.g., accident or hospital insurance)?

Best practice: Employees ought to be able to submit these claims in the same place, especially when they have multiple claims tied to one life event.

---

### ❓ How do employees report intermittent absences?

Best practice: Employees approved to take intermittent leave should be able to easily report their absences online in the same place. For accurate tracking and transparency, they must note the time, date and reason for the absence.

## BEST PRACTICE THREE

# Make leave preparation easy

### Provide clear steps, expectations and resources

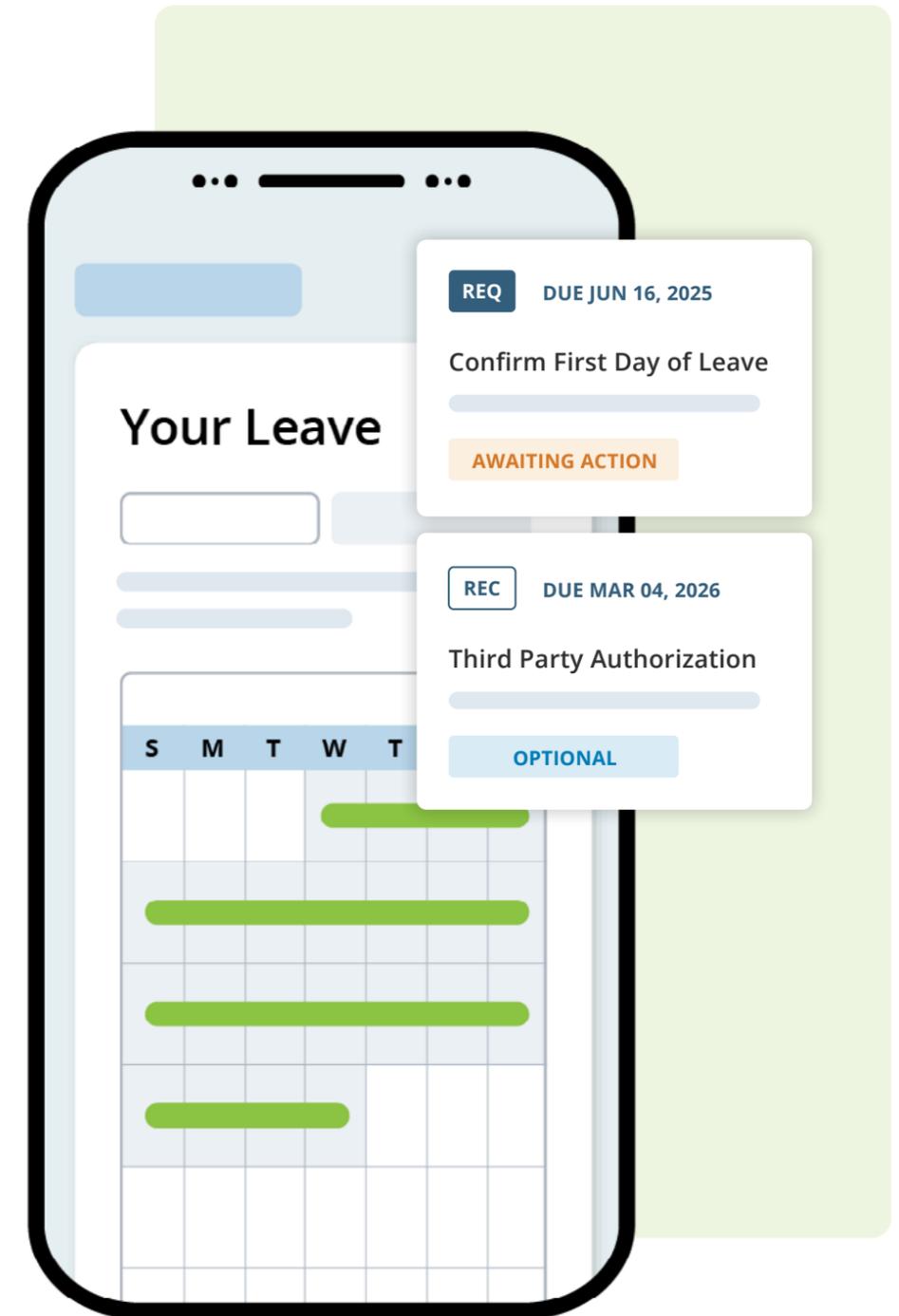
Once an employee's leave request is approved, the next steps should be clearly laid out, and their leave plan should be easy to access and understand. Transparency and communication help ease uncertainty, reduce confusion and help employees feel ready for their first day away.

Tools like checklists and email/text reminders support the employee in completing their tasks on time. That way things stay on track. By the time the employee is ready to sign off and start their leave, they should feel confident they have done everything they needed to do and can focus on their situation and wellbeing.



#### Ensure employees have visibility to:

- Their approved leave plan with key dates and coverages
- Their assigned tasks and due dates
- Correspondence from their disability carrier
- Which documents they must submit and how
- How to set up digital payments
- How to contact a leave specialist if they need help





## BEST PRACTICE FOUR

# Remain present while they are absent

## Find the balance between support and space

Employees shouldn't be thinking about work while they are on leave, but when questions come up about their situation, they need to be able to act. Having an employee-centered leave program means keeping the lines of communication open.

### During a leave, employees should be able to:

- View payment information
- Access any wellbeing and support services your company offers
- Contact a leave specialist if needed
- Request an extension
- Update their return-to-work plans
- Request accommodations
- Feel supported by their work community

Companies should offer ways for employees to get support around their leave-specific questions. Ideally, they would offer tools such as a live chat with a leave specialist or scheduled call-backs because many people who take leave are busy juggling medical and family needs.

Managers also play a role in employee leave. They should be understanding and supportive. To make it easy on the employee, companies need a system that allows employees to make leave-related updates and requests in one place. That information then needs to trickle to all appropriate people, including their manager and HR. The employee shouldn't be responsible for updating multiple parties.

## BEST PRACTICE FIVE

# Coordinate a smooth return

### Be flexible and kind

Transitioning back to the workplace can be difficult, especially when employees have experienced a serious life event.

### Clear return dates

Employees should have an easy way to confirm their return-to-work date ahead of time. This information should be clear to both HR and managers so everyone is prepared.

### A warm hello

Offer a warm welcome back. Managers should schedule regular check-ins to offer support and solicit feedback. This helps address any challenges and shows that their wellbeing matters.

### Readied accommodations

Ensure employees have the opportunity to request any accommodations, such as worksite modifications, work-from-home options or flexible schedules. Employers should connect employees to essential services like vocational rehabilitation and clinical support to create a return-to-work strategy that meets their needs.

### Ease reentry

Managers should be flexible where possible. Consider monitoring the workloads of returning employees to ensure they are manageable. Show grace during the transition.

### Easy paperwork

Make paperwork easy. Technology can help. When all forms (such as Fit For Duty), tasks and payment information is in the same online portal, the employee knows exactly where to go.

### Ongoing support

Returning to work is one thing, but staying at work is an ongoing consideration, especially for employees whose lives may look different than before they went on leave. It's important that employees have access to support. The support needs to be personalized to the person's needs. Some examples may include access to therapists, lactation support or nutritional planning. Offering wraparound supports can even prevent the need for future leaves.



### Offer support and resources

Offering targeted services, benefits and resources beyond the duration of the leave can improve the employee experience and make it easier to return to (and stay at) work.

### Sample supports include:

- Mental health resources
- Financial counseling
- Caregiving assistance
- Maternal resources
- Chronic pain management
- Digestive health support

# Jessica's maternity leave

An example of best practices in action



**JESSICA**

32-year-old | Registered Nurse

## BEFORE

### Planning

Jessica is expecting a child but isn't ready to share the news yet. She uses Unum Leave Logic to get a confidential and personalized maternity leave plan.

### Preparation

As her pregnancy progresses, she submits a leave request in the Unum Total Leave portal and promptly receives next steps. She can see her available benefits, complete tasks and sign up for digital payments.

## DURING

### On leave

After her baby is born, she logs in to the portal from her phone to update the delivery date. She gets fast digital payments while on leave and can access the portal any time to get help.

### Return-to-work readiness

Jessica faces setbacks in her recovery and with her mental health. A Unum life event specialist helps her submit an extension request and connects to Unum Care Hub where she is matched with a licensed therapist and other mental health resources.

## AFTER

### Return to work

Jessica receives a text to verify her new return-to-work date. When the day comes, she is warmly welcomed back.

### Ongoing support

Back at work, life looks different now. Jessica finds support with Unum Care Hub to navigate life as a working mom — from lactation support to nutrition counseling and continued therapy.

# Leave leave to the experts

## Solutions for both employees and HR

An employee-centered leave approach enhances worker satisfaction and ultimately fosters a positive company culture. Unum offers several solutions:

### unum® | Total Leave

Total Leave is a digital absence management solution that makes it easy for employees to request leave, receive benefits and return to work smoothly while streamlining every step for HR.

**Employees are empowered to plan and manage their time away with:**

- 24/7 portal access on any device
- Guided leave planning
- Easy leave requests and claim submissions
- Transparent view of claim progress and next steps
- Automated task reminders
- Near-instant payments
- Live chat support

### unum® | Leave Logic

Leave Logic is a self-service leave education and planning tool that demystifies the intricacies of how short term disability, FMLA, state leave and other leave types work together. Employees appreciate the ability to confidentially create a personalized leave plan and understand the benefits that apply to their unique situation.

### unum® | Care Hub

Care Hub is a suite of solutions that allows employers to care for their employees through the life moments that often surround leave and disability. Employees have access to a range of curated resources and services to support mental health, caregiving, maternal health, chronic pain management, digestive health and more.



## Digital first, not digital only

While our innovative technology powers exceptional employee experiences, it is our people who make the real difference, leading with empathy and personalized support through even the most complex leave situations.

**Our solutions are backed by:**

- **2,000+** leave and disability specialists
- **100+** clinical nurse consultants
- **60+** physicians
- **50+** vocational rehab consultants



# About Unum leave solutions

Unum offers fresh ways to take better care of employees, whether they need time away or extra support managing life's challenges — for a happier, more productive workforce.

[Learn more](#)



## More helpful resources

### WEBINAR

The employee leave journey

[Watch now →](#)

---

### GUIDE

The essential guide to leave program design

[Get the guide →](#)

---

### ARTICLE

Five steps to employee-focused leave management

[Read more →](#)



Better  
benefits  
at work.™

[unum.com](https://unum.com)

1 Unum internal data, 2024.

© 2025 Unum Group. All rights reserved. Unum is a registered trademark and marketing brand of Unum Group and its insuring subsidiaries.

NS-2550250      FOR EMPLOYERS      (6-25)