

that those sectors with employees with higher educational levels, tended to have lower levels of absenteeism.

Those sectors, which used positive control systems, had lower absenteeism levels.

Issues raised by managers in low absenteeism sectors are that poor motivation causes absenteeism; rewards for attendance is important; and that all employees are not treated equally – some employees are favoured by supervisors.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Retain employees with long tenure, that is workers who have been with the same employer for many years. Long service can be encouraged by providing privileges, for example three days additional annual leave after ten continuous years of service and another three days after 15 years of service.
- Use commonly used methods to measure absenteeism.
- Use positive attendance control systems such as analysing discrepancies between work load and capacity, assisting sick workers to get back to work as soon as possible, and providing safety training to increase productivity.
- Use self and team scheduling techniques where, for example, a worker or a team of workers decide in advance what shifts they are going to work the following month within an agreed number of shifts per month.
- Ensure that employees are well motivated.
- Ensure the jobs assigned to female employees are of equal importance. ■

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# Wages dropped and no lunch hours

## Cape Town's street cleaners

There is much talk of banning labour brokers.

**Phumlani Majavu** looks into the working lives of some Cape Town street cleaners and shows us precisely why this debate is so necessary.

It is almost unimaginable to think what the city of Cape Town would look like if it were not for the crucial work that outsourced workers, who are not directly employed by the municipality, do. Their job is more socially valuable than most, yet they work under appalling conditions. We do not appreciate them, as we ought to.

I am referring to street cleaners who sweep our streets every day. You can see them throughout the day, busy sweeping the streets, for you and I, and of course the tourists.

We live in a society that encourages us to know more about people such as Paris Hilton than about workers who clean our streets. It is important to acknowledge the role street workers play in our lives. So I decided to write this article and with that goal in mind I interviewed a number of workers.

Jane (43), one of the workers I spoke to, is a divorced mother of two teenage boys. She has been sweeping the streets of Cape Town for the past five years, and in those five years, her contract with the agency she works for has never been for more than three months.

Every time her three-month contract expires, she is forced to apply for the same job all over again. Sometimes, she does not get the job, but most of the time she is 'lucky' enough to end up on a contract.

While the price of goods, food included, was going up cleaning agencies, like Masibambane Recruitment and Midway Two, decided to cut her wages from R16 to R12.48 per hour, on 1 October 2008 to ensure that people like Jane stay miserable and destitute for the rest of their lives.

Jane explains, 'During the festive season, there's more

workload for us, because people tend to go out a lot, and throw things, like alcohol bottles all over. The beaches get dirty. So it is very odd for the agencies to cut down our wages at this time of the year.'

Furthermore, Masibambane Recruitment does not pay workers lunch breaks. An eight-hour shift actually means that workers work the full eight hours, the 30-minute break is separate. These workers work eight and half-hours a day and only get paid for eight!

Also, workers at Masibambane Recruitment and Midway Two are expected to work seven days a week (11am to 8pm), from Monday to Sunday, with no days off. As if street cleaners do not deserve to spend time with their loved ones like everyone else.

The workers that I spoke to pointed out that there are always problems at wage time. If their wages are not late, the hours are calculated incorrectly, or there are some irregular deductions. Furthermore, despite the amount of work they do during the festive season, they do not get any bonuses from their employers.

Jane hopes to get a 'permanent job one day'. A permanent job would save her the time involved in applying for the same job every two to three months. Among other things, she hopes that a permanent job would give her access to a good medical aid.

The only material that the agencies supply their workers with are gloves, bibs, and the broom, which, of course, needs to be returned once the contract ends.

Safety boots and uniforms or overalls are not provided by Masibambane Recruitment. Midway Two however provides its workers with a cap and a t-shirt

marked 'Our People, Our Advantage'.

Jane was wearing flops when I interviewed her. During winter, when the rain is pouring, they do not get raincoats or jackets from their agencies. They are forced to bring their own coats.

Jane is by no means the only person who is faced with this predicament. All the workers hired by these agencies have the same problems.

For instance, Candice (24), also hired by Masibambane Recruitment, has two - children a four-year-old boy and a five-year-old girl. She has been cleaning the streets for the past two years. She too, is forced to apply for the same job every two to three months. At times her contract lasts for one month only.

Not long ago, while on duty, she fell from the back of a truck and injured her left leg. Though the agency promised to cover her medical bills and the days she spent at home recovering from her injury, they did not. However, she is back at work, despite the fact that she is limping.

Like Jane and many others I spoke to, Candice wishes to be permanent, so that she can feed her two children, and see them go to good schools... and worry less about applying for the same job every two to three months.

As for Daluxolo (60), hired by Midway Two, he is forced to walk from the CBD area to Camps Bay almost every day unless his supervisors allow him to go home at 7pm. 'You see son,' says Daluxolo, 'the last taxi that is going to where I stay from town is at 7pm. Sometimes, by luck I can find one at, say half past seven, though that rarely ever happens. So if the

supervisor who is on duty on that day lets me finish at 8pm, there is nothing I can do but to walk all the way to Camps Bay.'

One can only imagine what Daluxolo feels like by the time he gets home. After finishing a very long shift, standing throughout the day, with no paid lunch break or tea time, he still has to walk from the CBD to his home in Camps Bay. And bear in mind that he is 60 years old.

Unlike the rest of the cleaners I spoke to, Daluxolo has no hopes of ever becoming permanent. He says he is too old, so there is no chance.

While the predicament of people doing one of the most socially useful jobs in the city is getting tougher every day, their bosses or 'recruitment officers' as they call themselves, claim that they're helping people get jobs. One of them was honest enough to tell me that 'every business is based on making profit', thus, following his logic, it's fine to overwork people in the name of profit. LB

*Phumlani Majavu is an activist and a freelance writer based in Cape Town. These interviews were conducted in December 2008 and January 2009 and he recently tried to update the information with the same workers. They refused to talk to him because their 'supervisors are watching us closely'. He tried to get their mobile numbers but they refused saying that they are not allowed to talk to the media about their working conditions. He found out that their wages have gone up by about R1.50 per hour and they are still not paid for lunch breaks.*