

Getting Paid for Nothing? The Legal Risks of No-Show Jobs

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From political scandals to organized crime cases, the phrase “no-show job” is often associated with something shady. Think HBO’s *The Sopranos*, where Tony Soprano’s crew collected paychecks on construction sites without having to lift a finger. The idea of being paid well for doing very little — or nothing at all — might sound like a dream job, but it often comes with strings attached. And now, with recent reporting about NBA star Kawhi Leonard’s alleged \$28 million endorsement deal, the “no show job” is back in the headlines.

What Exactly Is a “No-Show Job”?

A “no-show job” is a position where someone collects a paycheck without actually doing meaningful work. In some cases, the person is officially listed on the payroll but may not be expected to report or perform the same duties as other employees or contractors. These arrangements can take many forms, but typically include symbolic titles, roles specifically created for family or friends, or mechanisms for shifting money outside traditional channels.

No-Show Jobs in the Private Sector

In the private sector, employers have greater latitude to structure compensation as they wish. Executive contracts, retainers, and consulting agreements may guarantee pay, regardless of performance. Still, such arrangements can become problematic if they involve misuse of company resources, breaches of fiduciary duty, or violations of payroll and tax laws.

Public Sector and Organized Labor

With taxpayer funds, the line is far clearer. “No-show jobs” funded with public money are often the target of federal investigation and have led to convictions for fraud, embezzlement, and corruption. In labor relations, the practice of “featherbedding” (requiring payment for unnecessary work) has been unlawful since the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which prohibits unions and employers from agreeing to pay for work not actually performed.

Where Sports Money Gets Complicated

In professional sports, the legal issues surrounding “no-show jobs” differ from those in ordinary employment. In the NBA, the primary concern is salary cap circumvention. The league’s Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) requires that all compensation related to a player’s services be disclosed and counted toward the salary cap, promoting competitive balance among teams.

That’s why recent reports involving Kawhi Leonard are drawing attention. According to investigative reporting and bankruptcy filings brought to light by sports podcaster Pablo Torre, a now-bankrupt fintech company allegedly promised \$28 million to a Leonard-managed entity in exchange for endorsement duties that Leonard never performed. That company was reportedly

tied to Los Angeles Clippers owner Steve Ballmer, which prompts speculation about whether the deal was merely an off-the-books way to supplement Leonard's NBA compensation with the Clippers.

Notably, even if this would be considered a lawful private agreement under general contract law, a hidden "no-show job" arrangement of this kind could be interpreted as an attempt to skirt NBA salary rules. If proven to be the case, the league has the authority to impose penalties, including heavy fines or the loss of draft picks.

For now, both Ballmer and the Clippers have denied any wrongdoing. The NBA launched a formal investigation on September 3, but NBA Commissioner Adam Silver recently said the league is not rushing to judgment.

Still, the story highlights how compensation structures in sports or business alike can blur the line between creative deal-making and questionable circumvention.

Lessons Beyond the NBA

For businesses outside the world of professional sports, the Kawhi Leonard headlines offer a reminder that "no-show jobs" can trigger serious problems for employers. Shareholders may view it as misuse of company funds, regulators may question classification of workers, as well as payroll and tax compliance, and company reputation and trust may be at risk. The best practice for all employers is to have a clear record of what each employee on payroll is doing to earn their compensation.