

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

Loud Vacationing: A New Trend Making Itself Heard

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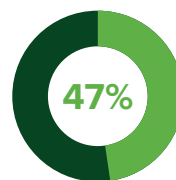
Research shows that taking vacations boosts productivity. Using time off to catch up on sleep, exercise, spend quality time with family and friends and reconnect with things that spark joy can help employees bring happier, healthier and more authentic selves to work.

How do employers encourage team members to take an appropriate amount of time off work and why should they care?

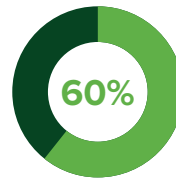
The question of whether employees are taking too much (or not enough) time off is an important one because it could indicate the existence of a cultural stigma that has negative implications. In other words, is taking time off frowned upon at any level of the organization? This may show up as employees who worry they will be perceived as uncommitted if they take the time they need or that they are burdening colleagues with additional work while they're out. It may be isolated or pervasive. And it can be prompted by colleagues asking them to complete work-related items when they're on leave or employees believing they cannot afford (figuratively or monetarily) to take time off.

Regardless of what prompts it, these perceptions can lead to quiet vacationing, where employees take time off without providing notice or going through the appropriate channels for request, and are not vocal or transparent about taking time away. Examples range from employees working remotely during their vacations to using "mouse jigglers" devices throughout the day to create the appearance of working.

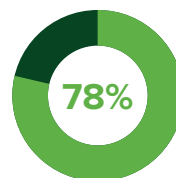
One of the top barriers to taking time off cited in a 2024 Harris Poll was the pressure to be available. More than 76% of employees "wished their workplace culture placed a stronger emphasis on the value of taking regular breaks and utilizing paid time off." Additional comments made by respondents included:



felt guilty about taking time off



struggled to fully disconnect during their time off



did not use their allotted amount of paid time off¹



Enter a New Phenomenon: Loud Vacationing

Loud vacationing is a term coined by Jennifer Kraszewski, Chief Human Resources Officer at Paycom. This term describes the act of making one's time off known. Compared with quiet vacationing, Loud vacationing vocalizes and celebrates taking time off.²

This approach requires leadership support that encourages employees to take time off. The transition isn't easy, and there isn't an effective one-size-fits-all approach. Success requires employers to take a closer look at the drivers of employee behavior and assess the success of their leave benefit plans.

Evaluating Time-Off Plans

Understanding the current state of your time-off program(s) and the culture of time-off within your organization is essential before implementing any changes. Case in point: a recent survey uncovered a disconnect between employer assumptions and employee needs when recipients ranked the top five benefits. While employees cited mandatory paid time off as one of their top five benefits, employers did not.³

As employees strive for a healthy work-life balance, influential factors (including technological advances like artificial intelligence and social media) cultivate a "work smarter, not harder" mindset. This means that more employees may demand more personal time in return for going above and beyond expectations in their roles. This insight into employee perceptions and use of time off will go a long way toward understanding what opportunities for change exist.

It is also important to distinguish between the amount of time granted and the time taken. Some companies separate vacation from sick time, while others combine them into one paid time off bucket. Understanding *how* employees use their time-off plans is necessary before considering changes.



Understanding Employee Usage

SCENARIO ONE:

Employees have a large amount of time left at the end of the year. This could signify that employees do not take enough time off or have more time than they can use in a year.

SCENARIO TWO:

Employees have minimal time left at the end of the year. This could signify that time-off allotments do not meet employee needs or that employees are using time to supplement unpaid leaves of absence or to fulfill caregiving obligations.

In either scenario, what factors contribute to an employee's time-off balance may still be unclear. Maybe employees cannot get their time-off requests approved due to staffing shortages, or they prefer to receive a year-end payout of accrued time off, if this is the company policy. Perhaps the current absence plan does not provide enough pay or leave to meet employee needs, which results in augmenting the time needed with banks of vacation or sick time programs.

Many accrued time-off policies include a carryover provision, which allows employees to carry over a certain amount of unused time into the following year. Some state laws require this with accrued vacation policies. Employees whose companies have a "use-it-or-lose-it" provision in their policies may find they do not have enough time accrued at the beginning of the year if a need for leave arises.

Job classification (e.g., exempt, non-exempt) may also affect time and attendance procedures, such as tracking time off. In many organizations, exempt employees are less likely to report or track this time.⁴ Understanding the root causes will help inform the appropriate solutions.

How Leaders Influence Employees

If a significant number of employees leave vacation days on the table, it may be time to examine how (or if) leaders take their paid time off. Because leaders set the tone for company culture, using vacation days and/or openly discussing vacation plans should be a regular occurrence, along with unplugging while away from work.⁵ Leaders should encourage employees to take vacations, ask about their trips and express excitement about them taking time off to recharge. These habits are crucial to building a culture that values taking time off.

Some organizations offer unlimited or discretionary time-off policies to some or all employees. These programs do not have a specified number of days that must be used each year, nor do they have any accrued monetary value. Unlimited time-off policies allow employees more flexibility with how they use time off and demonstrate a level of organizational trust that employees will use their time judiciously. However, there may be unexpected drawbacks inherently rooted in this design — no maximum or minimum number of days off. Employees (and even leaders) may exhibit bias toward employees who they believe take "too much" time off.⁶



But how is that gauged? It is important that unlimited time off programs are not viewed as untracked programs. Tracking is necessary to inform time-off metrics and maintain compliance with policies, laws and regulations. Reviewing banks of time off at a defined cadence may help employers determine how much time was reported and who is using the time. At a more advanced level, employers may want to consider how time is used (purpose, covered family member) to ascertain whether plan policy should be adjusted.

Nonetheless, employees may question taking more time off than their team members out of guilt or fear of being seen as an underperformer, or employees may begin to develop negative opinions toward team members who regularly take time off. Leaders can establish, measure and provide feedback on productivity benchmarks rather than focusing on the number of days away from work. Fostering a culture that values and rewards team contributions, regardless of time spent at one's desk, will direct employees' focus back to where it matters most. The idea is to encourage employees who are meeting their goals to feel more confident asking for breaks.⁶

Many employees forgo time off to be more productive without realizing that taking a break would help them accomplish their objectives. Research shows that taking vacations boosts productivity. Using time off to catch up on sleep, exercise, spend quality time with family and friends and reconnect with things that spark joy can help employees bring happier, healthier and more authentic selves to work.⁷



Helpful Tactics

Leaders should also regularly share best practices for requesting and taking time off, such as requesting time off in advance so teams can schedule coverage and prepare for changes to normal workflow.⁸ If team members worry that work will not get done if they take time off, consider cross-training on each process and dividing tasks across a team. This can alleviate the effects of a team member taking leave.

You can strengthen teams when someone is on vacation or taking time away by being supportive and accountable to the work underway, explaining how it is being handled and acknowledging the people who are covering the work. This often helps team members feel more comfortable taking leave.⁹ In other words, asking people to help and support each other can have a positive ripple effect when an employee is taking time off work.¹⁰

Employers can foster a well-rested and productive workforce by embracing a healthy relationship with time away. Time off is a critical component of employee benefit packages and one of the most highly valued benefits employees seek, so it should be treated as such. The way this is accomplished varies. Some companies are expanding office closures to ensure employees can disconnect from work without worry, while others are boosting efforts to assess use and mitigate as needed.

Assessing time-off program(s) — a process that should include a review of how time off is used and how it is tracked, as well as industry benchmarks — will help employers learn how to enhance these programs in ways that have a meaningful effect.

Considering employees spend a third of their lives *at* work, it is important to assess how leaders encourage them to take time away and build a culture that supports the mutual value of time spent *away* from work.

¹ [*The Harris Poll. Out of Office Culture Report., May 2024.*](#)

² [*Kraszewski, Jennifer. Forget Quiet Vacationing. It's Time for Loud Vacationing! Paycom. Aug. 12, 2024.*](#)

³ [*Forbes. Best Employee Benefits In 2025. Forbes Magazine. Oct. 30, 2024.*](#)

⁴ [*Time Analytics. Effective Strategies on How to Track Vacation Time for Salaried Employees. July 13, 2023.*](#)

⁵ [*Forbes Magazine. Quiet Vacations Are Out. Say Hello to Loud Vacationing. Aug. 16, 2024.*](#)

⁶ [*U.S. News. Unlimited PTO: What Are the Pros and Cons? May 29, 2024.*](#)

⁷ [*The Wall Street Journal. Why You Should Be Wary of the Unlimited Vacation Perk. Jan. 22, 2025.*](#)

⁸ [*Harvard Business Review. How Taking a Vacation Improves Your Well-Being. July 19, 2023.*](#)

⁹ [*SHRM. Nearly Half of Employees Expect to Leave Vacation Time Unused: What Should HR Do? Dec. 16, 2024.*](#)

¹⁰ [*Management-Issues.com. Proper Vacations Are All About Teamwork. The Connected Manager - Better Management in a Virtual World. July 19, 2022.*](#)



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