



# Want a More Productive Workforce?

## Send Employees on Vacation.

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Employers offer time off for their employees in many different ways. Some employers are more generous or flexible than others. But lately, the number of workers who qualify for vacation has decreased. One reason is that some employers are replacing full-time staff with part-timers.

Another recent trend is the rapid increase in the number of employees who do have earned vacation, but do not take advantage of it. According to a survey of 814 employees conducted by Right Management, a Philadelphia-based career consulting firm, 70 percent of respondents did not take all of their vacation time in 2011. This number was only 46 percent in 2010.

Michael Haid, Vice President of Right Management, says the findings of the survey suggest that many employees are still anxious about keeping their jobs. According to Haid, "We know from ongoing research that there's a lot of stress in the workplace. Staffing is lean, workloads are heavier, job security uncertain and the job market is weak. Vacation is fundamental to a healthy, productive work force. Foregoing a few days may not be significant, but when so many people think they shouldn't take the time they're entitled to, we have problems."

According to the Society for Human Resource Management, a membership organization that studies workplace issues worldwide, the recession has not substantially changed the number of employers offering paid vacations. The Right Management survey shows that 48 percent of employers offer paid time off, either as specific vacation time or as a package that may include vacation, sick, personal and holidays. Meanwhile, 16 percent of employers buy back unused vacation time from employees. Seven percent of employers offer a vacation purchase plan that allows workers to buy additional vacation days through a payroll deduction.

Perhaps one of the most unusual vacation benefits is that of the Philadelphia Sign Company. Instead of receiving vacation pay, employees receive extra paychecks for their vacations. For example, after 10 years, employees receive four weeks of vacation and also four extra weekly paychecks. They also have the option of cashing in unused vacation, sick and personal time every year on their anniversary dates. President and CEO, Bob Mehmel, says, "We know it's a lucrative package, but it's OK with us. It's always been this way. We're thinking about requiring employees to take maybe half of their vacation in real time instead of cash. Hoarding time is not good for their health." Eileen Stillwell for Courier-Post Staff, "Firms' vacation policies vary," [www.courierpost.com](http://www.courierpost.com) (Dec. 30, 2011).



# Want a More Productive Workforce? (continued)

## Commentary and Checklist

Vacations are important to the health of individual employees and, in turn, the overall health and productivity of the workforce.

Employees who actually unplug when on vacation come back more relaxed and more productive. The longer the vacation, the higher the percentage of employees who come back to work relaxed.

A 2009 study by Karen Matthews of the University of Pittsburgh's Mind-Body Center surveyed 1,399 participants.

The group also participated in other studies on breast cancer, cardiovascular disease and other conditions. The study found that leisure time promotes less depression, more positive emotions, fewer negative emotions and more overall satisfaction with life. Matthews' study also found tangible health benefits such as lower blood pressure, lower stress hormone levels and smaller waists, which contribute to less risk for heart disease and diabetes.

Generous and flexible vacation plans are, no doubt, a big hit with most employees. However, the challenge for employers is to encourage employees to actually take leave time and make the most of their vacations.

Managers and supervisors should work with employees on planning their vacations far enough in advance so that they can get some rest and relaxation. If employees must check in, arrange a schedule of two or three set times during their absence versus a "real time" connection to the office. Communicate with co-workers to make certain that they are not sending work to the vacationing employee.

Here are some other reasons to make the most of vacation time:

- Vacations allow employees time to recharge and help avoid burnout among team members.
- Employees who take their vacation often come back with new and fresh ideas.
- When an employee is absent on vacation, it allows you an opportunity to evaluate workload to determine if that employee is doing too much or too little.
- When employees go on vacation, you have a chance to evaluate how other employees react when faced with new opportunities.
- Vacation is also important for discovering fraud and theft. When dishonest employees leave for vacation, it becomes more difficult for them to cover their tracks and their work can be verified.

Should you have any questions or need further assistance, please visit our website, send an email or call us.



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