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THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING TIME OFF

By Meghan Koransky

When was the last time you took a vacation—or even a few days away from work? What about your employees?

Many Americans do not use all their paid time off, even when unused days do not roll over to the next year. Many worry about falling behind, burdening colleagues, disappointing clients, or appearing less dedicated. For some, cost is a barrier; for others, work has become central to their identity.

Skipping time off is costly. Prolonged stress and a lack of recovery time can contribute to mental fatigue, difficulty concentrating, memory problems, reduced productivity, and a weakened ability to manage ongoing demands. It can also increase the risk of unhealthy coping behaviors and adverse health outcomes, including smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, weight gain, and depression. For firms, unused PTO can contribute to higher absenteeism, increased disability claims, and lost productivity.

The Benefits of Taking Time Off

Employees who fully disconnect from work while on vacation often return with greater creativity, perspective, and renewed engagement with meaningful work. Lin-Manuel Miranda famously envisioned *Hamilton* while on vacation, later reflecting, “The moment my brain got a moment’s rest, *Hamilton* walked into it.”

The benefits extend beyond creativity. Time away allows people to recover from sustained stress, lowering tension while improving focus, brain function, and memory. Even planning a vacation can boost well-being by creating a sense of anticipation.

For firms, encouraging regular time off supports improved recruitment and retention, reduces absenteeism and costs, enhances client experiences, and contributes to a more sustainable workplace.

Making Time Off Part of Workplace Culture

Creating a culture that supports time off requires more than offering PTO—it requires leaders to remove the barriers that prevent employees from using it.

Lead by example. When leaders model healthy time-off behaviors, they make it easier for employees to prioritize rest and recovery. Fully disconnecting while away also demonstrates trust in the team’s capabilities. Before leaving, leaders should ensure a clear handoff of responsibilities, designate coverage for urgent matters, and cross-train team members as needed. Sharing positive anecdotes about vacation reinforces that time away is valued.

Communicate policies and processes. A clear time-off policy acts as a roadmap, outlining expectations and promoting equity among employees. Supervisors should remind teams of the firm’s policy, encourage employees to use their time off, and help plan workloads by temporarily redistributing responsibilities. Additionally, asking employees to indicate the week they will return, rather than the specific day, in their out-of-office message allows them time to catch up before responding to new requests.

Reduce barriers to time off. Employees may hesitate to take leave due to concerns about job security or personal finances. Firms can provide reassurance through flexible vacation policies and financial incentives that make taking time off more accessible, such as vacation stipends, travel reimbursements, wellness bonuses, or paid wellness experiences. They may also consider firm-wide shutdowns, during which all employees take vacation simultaneously, along with mandated PTO and flexible post-vacation hours to help employees transition back smoothly.

Why Time Off Matters

Taking time away from work is not simply good for employees; it is good for firms. The most successful workplaces recognize that doing your best requires time to rest and recover. By creating a culture where employees feel comfortable taking time off, firms invest in employee well-being—and in their own long-term success.