

UNWIND

YOU NEED A VACATION! Now, given that many of us recently were or still are forced to stay home from work, it's understandable that the notion of taking leave might sound laughable, seem impossible, or even elicit some resentment. Perhaps what you'd likely agree to more is that you need a break. Whether you're waiting to go back to work or you're working more than ever, something's got to give eventually. Unfortunately, even in the best and most normal of times, we tend not to take our earned time away from our work and daily responsibilities, especially as managers. Here's what you need to know about how taking time off benefits you and your employees.

THE BENEFITS OF BEING AWAY

What's appealing about a vacation is that it's a departure from your daily routine. Again, it may be impossible right now to imagine getting out of town, and financial concerns and health issues might have you wondering if you can even consider taking that regular family vacation. Nonetheless, taking a break from work, even if you don't go away, allows you time to do what you want to do instead of what you have to do. It helps you maintain balance, allows you to recharge your batteries, and come back refreshed. All of these things are important contributors to our well-being. Some other benefits of taking time off include:

- ✿ Increased productivity and ability to focus
- ✿ Higher levels of happiness
- ✿ Renewed energy
- ✿ Better work/life balance
- ✿ Improved mental clarity
- ✿ Better relationships with family and coworkers
- ✿ Reduced risk of burnout
- ✿ Increased job satisfaction



MAKING THE BEST USE OF YOUR TIME OFF

Despite the benefits, many Americans don't take complete advantage, either by not using their full allotment of vacation days, or by not fully disconnecting from work while on vacation. The reasons for this vary greatly, but some of the more common ones are feelings of guilt about burdening others with extra work, not wanting to appear less dedicated, fear of termination, lack of trust in those providing coverage, anxiety over a full inbox, and pressure from leadership. Here are some ways you can ensure you get the break you deserve, as well as set a good example for your employees.

Full-time workers in the U.S.

U.S. Travel Association; TurnKey Vacation Rentals, August 2019

54.2% Feel guilty about taking time off from work

70.4% Check in with work regularly while on vacation

768 MILLION Paid leave days forfeited in 2018

Plan.

Take time to look at the amount of leave you have, and expect to accrue over a year. Consider when you might want to take time off and consult with your family members if needed. Outline a tentative plan for yourself; put in a leave request well in advance to ensure that your manager will approve the time. Whether it's a vacation or a "staycation," plan time off for yourself.

Prepare.

In the days and weeks leading up to your time off – especially if it's an extended vacation – assess your workload and make a schedule to complete as much as you can before you go. What absolutely must get done, what can wait, and what can keep moving in your absence.

Delegate.

One mistake many leaders make is failing to have appropriate coverage. Appoint backups and meet with each one to brief them on what they might encounter while you're out, the current status of large projects, and who they can turn to if questions arise. Otherwise, when others aren't sure what to do or who to go to, projects could stall, or you might get a frantic phone call that could have been handled by someone else.

Set boundaries.

Make it clear to your leadership and your employees that you will not be available while you're away. Be sure to also set an out-of-office message that includes a list of everyone who's covering for you, along with their contact information. And if after all of that you still get a phone call, let it go to voicemail.

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We're all waiting for the day when we can finally regain some sense of normalcy, so while a vacation might not be in the cards for you just yet, start making plans to get away at some point. In the meantime, carve out time for yourself, even if it doesn't involve leaving the house. If you need help or want ideas for how to take a break, call the EAP to speak with a consultant. The Employee Assistance Program is a voluntary and confidential employee benefit available to federal employees at no cost.

