

It's Time to Begin Planning for Summer Vacations

By Holly Culhane, Contributing Columnist



It's January and the furthest thing from most of our minds is next summer's vacation. But for company supervisors and managers, this should be the time to begin thinking about and planning for their employees' vacations.

To delay will mean the difference between managing and reacting to vacation requests. It will mean avoiding the costly problem of "unused vacations."

According to a recent survey by Right Management, a career and talent management firm, nearly 70 percent of workers in North America do not plan to use all of their annual vacation time in 2014. They would rather be paid for the unused time, than take it off.

Depending on length of service, most workers can accrue two or more weeks of vacation a year. And unless specified in a contract or other arrangement, unused vacation can spill over into the next year. At the very minimum, it can require pay-out of unused time on an annual basis. Plus, when unused vacation time stockpiles, it can require a significant payoff when an employee separates from the company.

Unused vacation can be a dark cloud hanging over what some supervisors might consider to be a silver-lining – having a workaholic employee who never takes time off, so therefore never needs to have his or her work responsibilities covered by someone else.

But in the end, unused vacation is a liability that can affect a company's bottom line. Good supervisors manage this liability, rather than ignore it.

Besides the financial cost, unused vacation can have a productivity cost.

Employees at every level – from those who work on the line to those at the very top – should be encouraged to take time off to reenergize and relax. This is especially true in today's workplace, where companies are doing more with less and adding workloads to employees. Constant work can cause stress and lack of job satisfaction.

Management's encouragement for workers to take vacations fosters loyalty and satisfaction among employees. In the end, workers feel more engaged, turnover is reduced and productivity is increased.

Take steps in January to manage employee vacations.

- Peak vacation seasons are summer and spring and December school breaks. A vacation schedule should be administered fairly and in advance so workers can make plans. For example, just

because a worker is single and does not have children, he or she should not be passed over for a summer or Christmas vacation request.

- Require requests for peak vacation times to be submitted by the first quarter of the year.
- While seniority may be a factor in approving vacation requests, it should not be the only factor. Family needs and circumstances should be considered. Managers can help negotiate solutions when conflicts occur.
- Post and continually update a vacation schedule. Allow workers to negotiate “swaps” among themselves.
- All vacation requests must be approved – in writing -- by supervisors and managers. An employee just scrawling his or her name onto a schedule should not be sufficient.
- Determine how many workers can be on vacation at the same time. Depending on the company’s size, this may need to be determined on a department-by-department basis. Consult with workers about possible impacts and scheduling needs.
- Cross-train workers to provide vacation and sick leave coverage.

Properly planned and managed, employee vacations can be a positive benefit to both a company and its workers.

This article written by Holly Culhane first appeared online and in The Bakersfield Californian on Wednesday, February 8, 2014. Holly Culhane is president of the Bakersfield-based human resources consulting firm P.A.S. Associates. She can be contacted through her website www.pasassociates.com and through the [PAS Facebook](#) page or by phone at 631-2165.

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