Work Daze: A method to vacation-avoiding madness

by Bob_Goldman

It's summertime, friends, and you know what that means - time to count up all those vacation days and then not use them.

You heard me right. To succeed in business today, you not only have to work hard while you're supposed to be at the office, you also have to work hard when you're supposed to be lapping up the sunshine.

If you wonder why anyone in their right mind would rather be drinking office coffee than island margaritas, take a look at the next cubical over.

According to a survey from the Hudson company, 56 percent of all workers who get vacation choose not to use all of it, and that shocking number includes a truly deranged 30 percent who say they will take less than half of their days off, off.

Can all these vacation-avoiders have children so rotten and spouses so miserable that they'd rather be in the office than on the beach? Or are you the only one? Or, perhaps, just perhaps, there's a method to their vacation madness. By insisting on working while the rest of us frolic, these wisenheimers build up so much credit with managers that they can goof off for the rest of the year, while we're stuck keeping our sunburned nose to the grindstone.

If you work at the kind of job where self-sacrifice is expected, it may be time to start explaining to your family why this year's vacation will begin and end on the same Saturday afternoon. "Sure, we could jet to Jakarta or cruise to Corsica, but I think we'll have even more fun staying at home this year, and really getting to know each other."

If this gambit meets deaf ears, you can always try to send your family away on vacation while you stay home. It will be a shame to miss spending two rainy weeks stuck in a tiny, spider-infested cottage with your bored children and your cranky spouse, but we must make sacrifices.

Taking the "Thanks, but no vacation for me" option is no option for Peg Buchenroth, a senior vice president for human resources at Hudson. "Managers need to make sure employees are taking sufficient time away from the office," she says. "The benefit of time off often comes through in improved job satisfaction and greater productivity."

I'm not sure about the satisfaction and productivity part, but I'll bet that your managers have designed a brilliant plan for encouraging you to take time off. Their abusive, unreasonable, and just plain dumb decisions make work so darn unpleasant that you can't help but run for cover, even if the cover is only two weeks under an umbrella stuck into the kiddy pool in your own backyard.

If you find you must take vacation - and I know you have a fierce boss at home as well as at work - the least you can do is make sure you don't enjoy it. One proven way to ensure vacation dissatisfaction is to pack your cell phone and your laptop. The Hudson survey revealed that 35 percent of all managers check in with the office frequently, often daily. If you are on the other end of a long-distance checkup call, make sure your manager feels needed.

Crank up the party when the telephone rings, so your boss can hear every beer can pull-top pop. "We're doing fine without you," insist over a double decibel dose of rap music. "Is it OK if I use the Christmas party fund to pay the strippers?"

Only 14 percent of non-managers call in from vacation, and I suggest that you differentiate yourself from the crowd by being one of those who uses their vacation to smile and dial. Call your boss at least three times a day to let her know that you are concerned that your work will not be done to your high standards. Constantly offer to fly back and "take the wheel before the ship flounders and sinks on the rocky shores of incompetence."

You'll make a great impression, and with any luck she'll let you return.

One final survey result is interesting to contemplate. Twenty-seven percent of the managerial group report returning to the office more stressed than when they left, as compared to only 16 percent of non-managers. Could the explanation be that our managers are so egotistical they really do believe they're so essential that the company cannot possibly survive without their presence?

You go ahead and answer that question. I'm going on vacation.

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