

Weary workers substituting long weekends for traditional vacations

by Michael_Kinsman

If modern life is a series of trade-offs, American workers seem to be swapping their well-being for the "busyness" of their lives.

That is demonstrated in two findings from a recent survey by Yahoo! HotJobs that reports 45 percent of workers left unused vacation days on the table in 2006 and 36 percent say today they have too much work to take a vacation.

Too much work to take a vacation?

Something has gone terribly wrong in a healthy society when people choose to surrender leisure time in favor of work.

The survey reports that even when people take vacations, 70 percent are distracted or concerned about what is going on at work at least some of the time while they are gone.

This translates to a problem that workers and their employers need to think about. If the worker rejuvenation that comes from taking a week or two of vacation is sacrificed, there will be an emotional toll on workers and a subsequent productivity on the job.

"People don't always realize the true benefits of taking vacation time," says Susan Vobejda, vice president of Yahoo! HotJobs. "They focus more on the absence from work and related details, when in fact a vacation allows time to recharge batteries and come back to the office with new energy and increased productivity."

Unfortunately, our current vacation system doesn't work well. In some workplaces, taking vacation time is almost viewed as an act of betrayal.

As a result, American workers today are finding new ways to help them cope with the stress and press of their workloads.

The outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas reports that more workers are turning to three and four-day getaways as a means of coping with busy family schedules. With two-income households and

pressure on students to do extracurricular activities to help them get into college, families face an unusual new form of stress in trying to coordinate everyone's schedule.

"We are becoming a nation of the long weekend vacation, with workers looking ahead to each Monday/Friday holiday for the opportunity to turn a three-day weekend into a four or five-day weekend," says John Challenger, the firm's chief executive.

He believes employers are benefiting from this. More employers are embracing an encouraging these mini-vacations as a way to keep operations running smoothly.

"For the employer, these brief jaunts are the equivalent of a 10-minute power nap - they do not disrupt the rhythm of the workplace and afterward the worker is refreshed and ready to attack the job at hand," he says. "While workers may end up with more frequent vacation absences from the office, productivity does not suffer because they are gone for less time."

Commitment to a job is a stabilizing factor for many people. Over-commitment can become a debilitating and demoralizing experience.

Workers need to take breaks from their work to rejuvenate themselves. The personal lives are enhanced and when they return to work, they are better employees if they feel they have enough vacation time to recharge themselves.

The balance is left to everyone to determine. Each worker has to find the right balance for themselves.

But recognition that the "busyness" of life can be a hurdle to this is something everyone needs to consider and battle against.

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