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Three Reasons Your Company Should Make Vacation Mandatory



Jim Ludema and Amber Johnson Contributor ©

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1 benefit of team members taking vacation: you find where the gaps are. Vacation is good for business. @ValuesDriven



Getting a way from work is good for you, and for the business.

Are you one of the 52% of American workers who leaves vacation time unused? Yes? You're not alone. It's an epidemic amounting to [708 million unclaimed](#)

vacation days each year.


We get it: there's always more work to be done. The pressure to meet goals can be intense, as can the concern that our absence will create more work for others while we're gone, and an unbearable pile-up when we return.

But research and experience say taking time off may be the absolute best thing you can do for yourself, and your company. In fact, it's so important, companies should require (or at least strongly suggest) employees to use their vacation time. There are three immediate benefits:

1. It's a good way to develop leaders within your company;
2. It's a good way to spot potential trouble spots before they become a crisis;
and
3. It's incredibly good for the mental and physical health of your team members.

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Let's take those benefits one at a time.

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#1: It's a good way to develop leaders:

When senior leaders go on vacation, it gives high potential team members a chance to develop their leadership muscles. Senior leaders can make this learning possible by teeing-up an interim leader to sit in on higher level meetings, make decisions, and keep the ship afloat. This is an opportunity to express trust in an

emerging leader and give them a peak behind the curtain of the next level of leadership.

When Amber was a new manager, her boss planned an extended international trip and left her as the interim director for his much larger team. He'd not even landed in Africa before Amber was over her head with a significant challenge. It took a lot of effort, but she eventually figured it out and learned a lot about leadership along the way.

Leaders who take vacation time are expressing trust in their people. They're empowering team members to make decisions independently, which helps develop leadership capacity overall.

#2: It's a good way to spot potential trouble spots:

Tom*, a financial analyst, always thought his company's mandatory vacation policy was a little over the top. Sure, companies should give employees adequate vacation time. But force them to take it? That seemed too much – especially since the company locked the vacationing employee's email account while he or she was absent.

One summer, a colleague took his mandatory time away. In his absence, Tom and his co-workers made a discovery: their trusted colleague was actively engaged in unethical financial behavior that only became evident because the vacationing colleague wasn't able to manipulate the digital records.

This is an extreme example, but you get the point: when key players step away from work, we can find the gaps that exist in our processes before they become a crisis.

You can imagine much more benign circumstances, like team members who need a colleague to be trained as a backup for their responsibilities. Is Jane the only one who knows how to service a major account? Does anyone but Bruce know how to handle questions from senior leadership? Can anyone but Peter [put the cover sheet on the TPS reports](#)? When your MVPs take vacation time, it gives you a built-in reason to make sure your back-up processes are up-to-date.

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#3: It's good for your mental and physical health:

This may be the most important reason of all: taking vacation offers incredible health benefits. [People who take regular vacations](#) are less likely to die in the near future, have lower risk of heart disease, lower rates of depression, and experience alleviation from stress. You'll [get better sleep](#) too, so you return to work refreshed and ready to go.

Are you ready to pack your bags?

Leaders Must Set an Example

Now that we've unpacked the benefits of vacation time, it's time to make sure those vacations get scheduled. Here's how:

- Schedule your time away and announce it to your staff.
- Turn off completely while you're away and set the same expectation for your employees.
- Encourage your employees to plan their vacation time by asking about it in your next check-in meeting.

Some things never change: taking time away will inevitably mean coming back to a full email account and a backlog of projects. But you'll return refreshed, and with a new awareness of your team's capacity to manage while you're gone.

Time to pack your bags. And while you do, you might want to take one of these books from our [recommended reading list](#).

*Name and details changed.

We focus on high-performing, values-driven companies & leaders. For fresh content on culture, values & leadership, see [@ValuesDriven](#) or [our blog](#).



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We work at the Center for Values-Driven Leadership, at Benedictine University, where we study and consult with performance-focused, values-driven companies to understand...

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