



Why You Should Encourage Employees to Use their PTO While Working Remotely

This year's events have caused many people to work from home for the first time. With that comes a learning curve. There are new methods of communication to learn, new technology to use and new realities to face -- the most formidable one being that there is no physical separation between home and the workplace.

With the lines blurred between home and work, it can be harder for employees to unplug, check out of work, and most importantly take time off. It's easy for people to forego using their Paid Time Off (PTO) during this time, since they often feel they can just tweak their workday to accommodate personal events.

But just because your workforce is at home, doesn't mean they need to be working every day. In fact, it's beneficial to encourage employees to utilize their PTO while they're working from home for the following reasons:

When your workplace is the same place you sleep, relax and spend time with your family, it can be really tempting to check your email outside of work hours or work until later in the evening.

Work-life balance is still important, even when work and life happen at the same place

Work-life balance is essential for mental and physical health, but it can sometimes be more difficult to achieve when working remotely. When your workplace is the same place you sleep, relax and spend time with your family, it can be really tempting to check your email outside of work hours or work until later in the evening.

Before you know it, people are on the slippery slope to working constantly to the point of burnout. This is dangerous -- a [Harvard Business Review](#) study reported that the psychological and physical effects of burnout cost the United States \$125-\$190 billion a year in healthcare costs. Chronic conditions like digestive issues, heart problems, depression, and anxiety can all be attributed to the stress of burnout.

Taking PTO is an important part of creating separation between home and work and preventing burnout. When employees have the understanding that they do not need to be working just because their computer is nearby, they will be able to set healthy boundaries and experience better work-life balance.

Taking time off will make the time spent working more productive

Furthermore, remote employees can sometimes fall into a “half at home, half at work” mindset. While putting a load of laundry in the dryer between conference calls likely won’t derail an entire day’s productivity, tending to personal and family matters consistently throughout the day can.

But those who take PTO and dedicate it to personal activities can better focus on the task at hand during work hours. They also are far less likely to experience burnout or the stress of being “always on” at work. As we mentioned before, this has extremely positive mental and physical health benefits; but it goes further than that -- it actually helps employees perform better at work.

The [Harvard Business Review](#) reported on an experiment where a workplace that was notorious for having its employees skip their PTO required everyone to take one week off every seven weeks. While there were many interesting findings in this report, these were the key takeaways:

- Creativity improved 33%
- Happiness levels improved 25%
- Productivity increased 14%

It may sound counterintuitive, but one of the best ways to increase productivity and employee engagement is to stop working -- at least for a few days at a time.

Disrupt the “workcation” culture

America’s demanding work culture has led to a rise in the “workcation,” where people are physically away from the office/workplace, yet still continue to work. This is particularly problematic for remote workers, who are always away from the office and therefore may be compelled to continue working even when they are traveling or taking part in personal activities.

This is because, according to a Project Time Off study, 52% of workers fear that others cannot do their job, or fear creating a burden for their coworkers. This fear typically comes from either from a demanding boss, or from an intrinsic fear. Either way, employers should make the effort to not only encourage PTO but encourage the employee to completely disconnect from work during their time off.

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Be proactive in encouraging employees to use PTO

It's important to be proactive and establish a company culture where taking PTO is encouraged. Frequently communicate your policy, especially if certain days cannot roll over to the next calendar year.

It's also important to set the expectation that employees' boundaries will be respected during PTO. Encourage employees not to answer work emails or phone calls when they are on PTO and speak with managers and team leaders about handling PTO within their teams. That way, they aren't pressuring their team members into working during PTO and can ease their anxiety about coming back to an extreme workload.

Proactively opening the lines of communication will help your remote workers confidently use their PTO, creating a more productive, engaged, and happier workforce.

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For more information, updates, and tips as they pertain to the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit our [site](#) dedicated to providing you the latest information.

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