



Ideas and information for human resource professionals



No Vacation Nation



The United States has a bad reputation related to vacation time. Dubbed the “No Vacation Nation” by The Center for Economic and Policy Research, the average U.S. paid time off (PTO) policy pales in comparison to other countries. Furthermore, U.S. employees

take less vacation, often leaving paid time off on the table at year end. A [2018 research study](#) conducted by Northstar Research reported that U.S. employees leave an average of four days uncollected at year end. And the travel restrictions related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic have not helped the situation!

Employers and HR professionals can play an active role in promoting time off usage by utilizing these three strategies.

- **Walk the talk.** Managers set the tone for healthy vacation habits. That means not only using their vacation time but also disconnecting when out of the office. A manager who emails their way through a trip to Disneyland sends a message to their team that staying connected with work is expected at all costs. Managers can model what a solid vacation preparation plan looks like by assigning open projects to teammates and trusting them to take the lead in their absence.
- **Add vacation planning to onboarding and regular meetings.** Day one is the perfect time to start vacation conversations. Tell your new hire how to request time off, set expectations for communications (minimal) while away and how they should prepare others on their team. Let them know how important time off is on your team to boost creativity and avoid burnout. Add vacation planning to your team’s regularly scheduled meetings and check-in conversations. Encouraging open communication on this topic sets the tone that paid time off is a part of normal business.

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- **Reward time off.** Yes, you read that right. Don't just encourage your team to take time off, reward them for using their PTO. Make it easy for them to step away from a busy job. Applaud those employees who are not just taking time off but also doing a stellar job of setting up their out of office coverage. How? Offer a travel voucher or gift certificate to incentivize a vacation. Add employees who use their PTO to a prize drawing. Look for ways to make it a valued activity.

The [benefits of vacation](#) are numerous. Time away from work to rest and relax contributes to heart health, engagement at work and decreased stress levels to name a few. Don't let travel restrictions and health concerns deter you from giving yourself a time out. Time off doesn't have to be used solely for a trip that requires a hotel room or a passport. Decompressing from work can be done from home – the key is to disconnect from your work responsibilities and reconnect with activities that fill you with joy.

The Myth of Done



“I am so busy.” This is a standard response if you ask a handful of people how work is going. For many, busy is a positive response. It implies they are needed at work and passionate about what they do. But for others, this busyness feels more like an anchor pulling them down, like they are running toward a finish line they can't reach. It means they wake up each day feeling behind. Carrying a “to do” list that doesn't seem to be getting shorter can turn into [feelings of guilt or shame](#), further negatively impacting the individual. Those who feel this burden can try to turn this dread into excitement by practicing self-compassion and recalibrating priorities.

Those under a mountain of work without relief in sight should take time to strategize. It may sound counterintuitive to spend time planning, but this step will help you recalibrate priorities. First, look at each task on your list and evaluate the level of urgency. If something doesn't need to be done this week, move it to another list and off your action items. Second, evaluate whether you can get help on the task. Do you need to be the person to complete the task, or can you delegate it to another team member? Often, we are overwhelmed by responsibilities that could be moved off our plate for one reason or another. Freeing up your time for urgent items that you must own can shrink your priorities and be used as a guide to help you determine what projects to take on in the future. This is especially important for “yes people” who tend to accept assignments without thinking twice.

You cannot be all things to all people. When you are hitting it out of the park as a spouse or friend, you are likely not able to put in the same effort at work and vice versa. You are but one person. Instead of beating yourself up, try being generous with yourself. How can you reframe the situation to focus on your value instead of a deficit? The words you use to speak to yourself are very important and impact your actions. Look for opportunities to acknowledge your work. For example, what if you chose to celebrate your accomplishments at the end of each day? It is easy to overlook what you were able to get done when you feel like work is piling up.



No one wants to get up in the morning and dread going to work because of an [intense pressure to catch up](#). Neither does anyone want to carry feelings of guilt or shame home, interrupting time you should be enjoying away from your desk. Your time is valuable and can be reclaimed by being gentle with yourself and taking another look at your priorities.

Working the Coach Approach into Your Leadership Style



As a manager, you shoulder the responsibility of leading your team to accomplish big, hairy goals. When deadlines are tight, your gut instinct may be to get it done quickly as possible. So, you use a directive style to tell employees exactly what to do, leaving little room for error. While this may be appropriate for entry level staff or new team members, it is likely an ineffective approach for experienced team members eager to further develop their problem-solving skills. Today's leaders should develop a repertoire

of tools they can call upon depending on the situation. Coaching is one of those [key skills](#). Managers can start to [build this competency](#) by using these recommendations.

1. **Pause before responding.** Historically, managers were promoted because they had subject matter expertise in a specific area. A phenomenal engineer was tapped to lead a team. A star salesperson was pulled from the ranks to oversee a region. Times are a-changing. As a result of rapid innovation and technology advances, today's managers may lead teams who have more knowledge in a specific area than they have. In this case, managers should take a different approach when employees come to them with questions or problems. Instead of jumping in to solve a problem or direct an employee, managers should pause. Listen to the facts of a situation. Allow time for the employee to explain and process their thoughts *before* you chime in.
2. **Avoid the question, "why?"** Questioning is at the heart of a coach approach. After giving the employee the floor to thoroughly explain, managers can practice this technique by asking questions to help the employee sort out their thoughts. Dig into the what, where, who and when of a situation. Often, the individual will identify a solution out loud during the discussion. Bingo! One note of caution - use the "why" question sparingly. It tends to put people on the defensive. Instead of opening up during the conversation, they build walls to protect themselves from being blamed for an error.
3. **Start with spot coaching.** Managers may hesitate to start coaching because they believe the time commitment is too great. A leadership study conducted by Daniel Goleman concluded leaders were least comfortable using coaching in their managerial style and described it as "slow and tedious work." The truth is that using coaching techniques are not limited to formal and lengthy meetings. You can apply this framework in conversations that take place throughout the day – in a team meeting or while discussing a project in passing. Start by disregarding the assumption that you know the answer, and act on your curiosity. Your inquisitive example is a great model for other team members as well.



One of the outcomes of the past 18 months of market instability is that employees are reevaluating how work fits into their lives. Employees are looking for more from their workplace: more support, more resources, more flexibility. One of the people they are seeking more support from is their manager, and managers must be agile to meet the needs of team members. One way to exercise your flexibility is to add a few new techniques to your managerial toolkit – building your coaching muscles is a great place to start!

The Adverse Effects of Buzz Words on Hiring



Jargon is commonplace in the business world. Take job descriptions for example. Different companies and industries latch onto distinct phrases in their write-up of the environment, role, and requirements. Those “in the know” may interpret this word choice as validation that they are a good match for the position. Unfortunately, this means those with different backgrounds and experiences may be confused or even put off by the verbiage. Recruiters beware: as a result of this word selection, you may be [discouraging diverse](#)

[candidates](#) from applying for a role where they, in fact, meet all the qualifications.

Complicated or vague words and phrases like “cloud-forward,” “bespoke” and “self-starter” clutter many job descriptions. Canva recently conducted a [large-scale study](#) of more than six million online job descriptions. Their results showed that jargon was widespread across the professional world. More than 35% of job postings contained corporate lingo that was difficult to understand or left room for interpretation. The biggest offenders? The tech industry and the state of Washington! In fact, more than half of all job descriptions in Washington were colored with unintelligible catch phrases.

Upon closer review, it appears there is a mismatch between employer intent and outcome. Most job description authors approach this process with the goal of using terms they think will be attractive and familiar to qualified candidates. Unfortunately, too much lingo may have the opposite effect on potential diverse hires. Applicants are put off by the complicated jargon and may assume they are not qualified for the job if they don’t understand the description. This response is seen to affect a range of potential respondents including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, non-native speakers, and younger applicants in the 16- to 24-year-old age group. Your word choice may also affect whether female applicants are drawn to the role. Using stereotypically masculine language such as “aggressive” or “hard-hitting” may send a subconscious message to women that they are not welcome to apply. Interestingly enough, the reverse is not true; men apply regardless of the frequency of traditionally feminine words.

The trend of using catchy terminology has an adverse impact on who does, and does not, apply. The solution involves taking a step back. Try using commonplace language that is easy to understand. Instead of saying “think outside of the box,” try “come up with new and interesting ideas related to xyz project.” Be specific! Vet your job requirements before putting pen to paper. Identify the actual needs and speak to the audience who may have these qualifications. Avoid using phrases that require interpretation or use of a business dictionary. Simple is better. It is fair to say we are all “on the same page” on this topic.