



 · [Focus areas](#) · [Compensation and benefits](#)

Why are workers still not using all their vacation time?

'Companies need to ensure that their teams are actually taking time to step away'



By [John Dujay](#)

Jul 14, 2022 / Share





FREE WHITEPAPER:

Considering an HRIS but don't know where to start?

Download this complete buyer's guide from Avanti



DOWNLOAD NOW

This not only means employees are risking burnout but the organization must account for the missed time off as a financial liability in the books.




FREE WHITEPAPER:
Are you interested in setting up and running a group retirement savings plan?

Access this free whitepaper from Wealthsimple Work for expert strategies and top ten best practices for employers



[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

So what’s a big hurdle? Guilt, according to a recent survey looking at paid time off (PTO) among U.S. and European workers.

“When it comes to taking any amount of time off work, 32 per cent of Americans feel bad stepping away from the office. This is using their PTO, this is time guaranteed to them, it was part of their job offer and they still feel bad about stepping away compared to just 23 per cent of Europeans,” says Megan Sanctorum, media relations person at Digital Third Coast in Chicago.

Most Americans, 81 per cent, get four weeks or less of paid time off, while most Europeans, about 70 per cent, get four weeks or more, she says.

Changes due to pandemic

These attitudes are being affected by behaviour exhibited during the pandemic, says an HR expert, as vacations and time off fell by the wayside, especially in the early days of COVID.

“They did it because probably they didn’t need to or they wanted to save the time for next year when they could actually vacation, where they could go somewhere,” says Julie Bevacqua, president and cofounder of HR services firm Rise People in Vancouver.




FREE WHITEPAPER:
Creating a Modern-Day Employee Experience



[↑](#)




FREE WHITEPAPER:
Considering an HRIS but don't know where to start?

Download this complete buyer's guide from Avanti



[DOWNLOAD NOW](#)

“It’s likely that habit has carried over because now there really are no boundaries between work and life so I think some of it has just spilled over.”

Read more: [Thirty per cent of Canadians didn’t take all of their time off in 2021, according to another survey.](#)

Other reasons could be a feeling that you are letting your coworkers down by transferring work to their desks.

“We did find that 37 per cent of Americans say they actually regret taking vacation time because of the workload: whether that’s putting in extra hours before they have to leave or when they come back, just that dreaded inbox with all the emails and getting caught up on projects,” says Sanctorum.

“That number was pretty shocking: a vacation is meant to be relaxing, rejuvenating; you should come back feeling fresh and to know that 37 per cent of Americans and 33 per cent of Europeans have regretted it, it’s sad to see.”

**FREE WHITEPAPER:**
Considering an HRIS but don't know where to start?
Download this complete buyer's guide from Avanti



DOWNLOAD NOW

The survey included 553 Americans and 557 Europeans, all with full-time jobs, and was conducted in April.

The stresses of vacation

When employees do take time off, occasionally the workplace follows them as well, found the survey.

Almost half (47 per cent of Americans and 48 per cent of Europeans) reported they checked email while away from the office and around one-third (30 per cent of Americans and 31 per cent of Europeans) texted coworkers.

“Maybe that’s because it’s on their phone and it’s easy for them to access or maybe because their work laptop is now on their kitchen table and so it’s easy for them to do. There could be a lot of reasons



**FREE WHITEPAPER:**
Considering an HRIS but don't know where to start?

Download this complete buyer's guide from Avanti



DOWNLOAD NOW

[This inability to fully log off](#) may be contributing to burnout, says Bevacqua.



“As a company, you see higher productivity from time off when they are rested, and time off is just really essential to the health and wellbeing. Disconnecting from work really helps employees reconnect with their work so it’s important that companies offer the flexibility and time,” she says.

In addition, 57 per cent of Americans and Europeans reported their bosses contacted them during time off.

“Whether that’s a phone call, an email, their boss is still reaching out to them on that time that they’re supposed to be resting, rejuvenating, and getting ready to come back to the office feeling refreshed, so that could be something for companies [to stress], just the importance of allowing their employees to have that time to rejuvenate,” says Sanctorem.

Role of leadership

Eliminating this guilt starts at the top, says Bevacqua.

“Leadership should be by example: they should be doing things like mentioning vacation time, demonstrating flexibility, holding people accountable to actually taking the time off by creating internal campaigns and reminding employees ‘It’s time to recharge.’ Even something as simple as sending out an email can go a really long way to reducing those feelings of guilt when taking time off.”

Read more: Fifty per cent of workers say [they have been subjected to vacation shaming at work](#), which happens when managers or colleagues employ guilt or negative pressure that discourages them from taking their full allotment of time off.

For leaders who are also grappling with scheduling and actually following through on their own time off, this involves making some



FREE WHITEPAPER:
**Considering an HRIS but
don't know where to start?**

Download this complete
buyer's guide from Avanti



**DOWNLOAD
NOW**



“As a leader, it’s always difficult to fully disconnect; you always feel that you have to be around in case something comes up but what really matters is taking the time to disconnect. Don’t attend the meetings that you don’t need to. Just choose things that are really urgent and critical and back away from everything else. Setting the example means really stepping away from the business.”

Unlimited time off?

One of the newer ideas being floated in organizations to combat the reluctance is by offering unlimited PTO, but 43 per cent of Americans say they would under-use the policy, finds the survey.

“Even having that time off, they might not even use it to the full extent that they would like to,” says Sanctorum.

Read more: Although an appealing employee-friendly perk, [unlimited paid vacation time presents several compliance challenges](#), says one employment lawyer.

If you’re going to put a program like this in place, you really need to ensure that you’re taking action and holding people accountable to taking the time, says Bevacqua.

“You want them to step away and recharge. Companies need to ensure that their teams are actually taking time to step away.”

Latest stories

[Can masking policies lead to constructive dismissal?](#)

[With rise of monkeypox, NDP calls for better sick leave](#)

[Is higher pay the answer to employee turnover?](#)

Free newsletter

The Canadian HR Newswire is a FREE weekly newsletter that keeps you up to date on news, opinion and analysis about the field of human resources. Please enter email address below to subscribe.

Sign up



FREE WHITEPAPER:
**Considering an HRIS but
don't know where to start?**

Download this complete
buyer's guide from Avanti



**DOWNLOAD
NOW**