

# IS IT TIME FOR unlimited time off?



with Mary Drueke-Collins

While more and more perks — catered lunches, on-site gyms, immunizations programs — are about employee health, wellness, and happiness, they ultimately are also designed to keep workers at work. A recent article in *Quartz at Work* points out that more than anything, employees want more time off and out of the office. Unlimited time off, to be exact.

Once the perk of tech firms and startups, more companies are beginning to explore unlimited paid time off. And, though still rare at only one to two percent of companies, it's a popular request in part because workforce demographics continue to shift. Nearly half of employees are Millennials, whose priorities are changing the benefits conversation. For this group, finding more balance and having more control of their time are key. In part, this may be because time off has fundamentally changed. *Well and Good* looks at the fact that, with near-constant connectedness, vacation days often still involve checking email and getting other notifications.

Add to that cultural and workplace expectations of accessibility and availability, and workers are at risk for burnout. One in four workers report feeling burned out all the time and almost half feel burned out sometimes. This burnout can cost employers in lost productivity, and employees in terms of health and happiness. Today, someone doesn't need to psychically spend 90 hours a week at the office to be working 90 hours. With our always-on lives, restorative time off is rarer but still as important to prevent burnout.

That doesn't mean every business is jumping on the unlimited time off bandwagon. Want other ideas? A writer for *The Guardian* suggests a middle ground, with more days off the longer an employee has worked at a company. And, while rollover sounds generous, it may make employees less likely to use it. Want to give it a try but concerned about misuse? That's understandable. Consider this- it's also more than reasonable to consider limits on unlimited and critical to set sound guidelines around pay as well as whether days off can be all in a row.

For many employees, unlimited time off offers the extra flexibility for life's challenges and can aid satisfaction and retention. Before HR Departments worry the system will be abused, research shows that people take significantly less time off when it's unlimited. In fact, what may be more impactful is a minimum number of days off may be required so as to ensure employees take advantage of a benefit meant to restore and replenish their energy, creativity, and engagement.

Unlimited time off may not be the right fit for all businesses, but maybe some variation of it could work for your business.

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