

June 18, 2007

*As summer vacations approach, I wanted to share with you an article that I recently came across. It offers some outstanding "food for thought" to maximize the enjoyment of your vacation. Feel free to pass it on to others who can use it. I'm sure you can guess who they might be...*

## **Are You Working or Vacationing? One-in-Five Americans Work While on Vacation**

*By Rosemary Haefner, Vice President of Human Resources for CareerBuilder.com*

After months without a day off, it's official: You need a vacation. But you feel you just can't leave the office for a long weekend, much less five days or -- gasp! -- two weeks.

You ask yourself: "Will the office survive without me?" "What if I'm replaceable?" or "Will people resent me if I take some time off?" Instead of chancing it, you'll just check your e-mail a few times, leave your cell phone number in case someone needs to contact you, and dial into your weekly conference call.

### **The E-Leash**

Although an improvement from 27 percent in 2006, 20 percent of workers say they plan to stay in touch with the office during their vacation this year, according to CareerBuilder.com's annual vacation survey, conducted by Harris Interactive of more than 6,800 workers. While only nine percent of workers say their employers expect them to check voicemail or e-mail on vacation, others may feel the pressure to do so anyway.

Work can be demanding, but taking it all with you just brings the stress to a new location. Cell phones, pagers and other electronic devices can create an e-leash of sorts. And then there's good, old-fashioned guilt: 14 percent of workers report feeling guilty about missing work while on vacation.

There are a host of reasons why employees feel compelled to forgo a vacation or obsessively check in with work. Some may fear if they are gone and things go smoothly, it will send a message that they aren't needed. Others worry that business won't be conducted properly or key projects will fall apart.

Planning ahead, managing expectations and setting boundaries with your co-workers are key to making sure you get the break you need. To enjoy a stress-free and work-free vacation, try these tips:

#### **1. Leave a roadmap.**

A few weeks before you leave, start recording important information, key contacts and any deadlines that will come up while you are gone. If you leave co-workers with a guide that will help them address questions that arise and keep things moving forward, they will be less likely to contact you on vacation and you will be less likely to walk into a war zone when you return.

#### **2. Stick to an itinerary.**

While it's best to leave the office at the office, if you must do work, set limits and boundaries for yourself and your co-workers. Don't let activities on vacation be interrupted by work. Instead set aside a half hour each day to

think about work and stick to it. Instead of having co-workers call you, tell them when you are going to check in, so you can control the time allotted.

**3. Think big.**

If you have a big project and a great vacation planned for the same week, you can expect one of the two to give. Schedule the dates before and after the big stuff to lighten your load and enjoy your time off.

**4. What if you're the boss?**

If you're working for yourself, make sure you anticipate your busy seasons by reviewing your previous sales and current situation. Save vacation time for slower periods and make sure to notify customers in advance.

**How Do You Compare?**

According to the Families and Work Institute, it takes up to three days to relax when you go on vacation and longer vacations (seven days or more) are associated with better psychological outcomes than shorter vacations. Some workers may not be able to get away at all, according to the CareerBuilder.com survey. Twenty percent of workers report they won't take a vacation this year; one-in-four will take five days or less; and nearly one-in-ten will limit themselves to weekend getaways -- hardly enough time to recharge.

When it comes to time off, more than 40 percent of workers feel they don't get enough paid vacation. The majority (70 percent) get two weeks or more of paid vacation; nearly a quarter of workers receive four weeks or more. But, 12 percent of the workforce does not receive any paid vacation. If workers had their way, 69 percent say three weeks or more of vacation is appropriate.

In a separate survey, Expedia.com analyzed the vacation habits of employed workers in the U.S., Great Britain, Germany, France and Spain. Among the countries surveyed, Americans receive the fewest vacation days on average per year, earning only 14 days, compared to 24 days in Great Britain, 26 days in Germany, 30 days in Spain, and 36 days in France.

*Rosemary Haefner is the Vice President of Human Resources for CareerBuilder.com. She is an expert in recruitment trends and tactics, job seeker behavior, workplace issues, employee attitudes and HR initiatives.*