

Job worries keep workers from using their vacation time

More employees are choosing to skip their vacation, even though it's a paid benefit

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By [David Bauerlein](#)

Jacksonville, FL – June 18, 2010 - Call them "naycationers."

They keep their nose to the grindstone and leave vacation time unused, even though it's a paid benefit to which they're entitled.

An online survey by Right Management found 66 percent of employees did not use all their vacation time in 2009. Right Management, a workforce consulting firm, said "pent-up fears about job security" might have been a factor in people being unwilling to use vacation. Expedia.com's annual vacation survey conducted in early 2009 found 34 percent of workers don't use vacation time.

Whatever the figure, it's a fact that many people show up at work when they could be taking a long trip or at least enjoying a long weekend.

"I personally would encourage people to take time off because that's how you get recharged," said Nancy Russell, a human resource management consultant who works as an independent contractor in Jacksonville. "That's why they [businesses] provide that benefit to you."

With 2010 almost halfway gone and the summer travel season here, it's time to lock in vacation dates by penciling them into the calendar and requesting the time off.

Planning ahead is simple enough, but failing to do so is one of the main reasons people lose vacation time.

"You're just so busy that you don't think about scheduling vacations, and before you know it, the end of the year is here," said Linda Willey, director of human resources at ICON in Jacksonville.

It doesn't have to be a weeklong vacation. An increasingly popular vacation choice is the "breakation" lasting three or four days. Those shorter getaways tend to go along with the "staycation" trend of shorter trips to destinations closer to home. They can be spread across the year.

The Expedia survey found that only 10 percent of employees take extended vacations of two weeks or more, which was down from 14 percent in 2008. About 12 percent of men are likely to take a lengthy vacation, compared with only 8 percent of women, according to the survey.

Willey said people in management positions tend to leave more vacation time on the table than other workers. She said she also sees differences between younger and older employees.

"The younger generation has seen how hard their parents worked," she said. "They say they're going to have some balance in their lives and not be so workaholic."

There is a risk to taking too much vacation too soon. Companies often give workers a single pot of paid time off that can be used for a variety of reasons such as vacations, illness or caring for a family member. That policy responds to the fact that employees also have duties as caretakers for children and for aging parents, said Pat Siemaska, Northeast Florida human resource manager for Landrum Professional Inc.

"It gives people more flexibility," Siemaska said. "They don't have to call in sick when they have to take care of a child."

Employees who drain the account for vacations can find themselves in a bind if they become ill or must care for a family member. Siemaska and Russell said in their experience, it's more common for employees to run into problems by using vacation time too quickly.

"You really have to know your company's policy and understand it," she said. "Most people don't."

Some questions to ask are whether vacation time carries over at the end of the calendar year or is it a "use-it-or-lose-it" offer. Siemaska said some companies will let employees carry over unused vacation days, or give workers an additional three months to use them after the end of the year. Others might let employees cash in unused days at year's end.

"That's kind of like a Christmas bonus," she said. "It comes at a good time."

Whatever the policy, employees should ask for the written guidelines and be familiar with them.

Employees worried that taking vacation will hurt their job security should make arrangements at work to help keep things running smoothly in their absence.

That's especially important when employers have cut back jobs and increased the workload of remaining employees. In one measure of the economic anxiety facing workers, an online survey done for Capital One Banking in January found 25 percent saying they would work every day of the year - weekends, holidays - if they could double their income.

Siemaska said it's a misconception for people to think employers want them to avoid vacations.

Expedia.com's Vacation Deprivation Survey found 40 percent of women felt guilty taking time off from work, compared with 29 percent of men.

"I think employers want their employees to take a break and take care of themselves," Siemaska said.

Ultimately, employers benefit, too, when workers take well-timed vacations and return able to work more productively.