



Are Your Employees “Quiet Vacationing” This Summer? 8 Ways to Support Your Workers and Strengthen Your PTO Policies

Insights

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By now you’ve heard of “quiet quitting” — a movement where employees rejected hustle culture or going above and beyond what their jobs required. But a new trend this summer takes the “quiet” concept to another level. Instead of using available vacation time, remote employees are doing the bare minimum to look productive while they are actually on vacation. Are such employees simply taking advantage of flexible arrangements or is this a sign of a toxic work environment that forces employees to hide their time off? Here’s what you need to know about quiet vacationing and an eight-step plan to strengthen your paid time off (PTO) policies.

What’s Happening?

Terms like bleisure travel, workcations, and hush trip have been around for a while — and some of these concepts can actually have benefits for employers and employees alike. For example:

- **Bleisure trips** — which combine a scheduled business trip with some leisure time off — can reduce the time and expense for employees taking a needed break.
- **Workcations** enable employees to continue doing remote work from an ideal vacation spot they can explore in their free time.

The idea behind these arrangements is that the employee is still accomplishing their work goals while exploring the new location outside of business hours. There are a host of benefits, as well as potential performance and legal risks that you will have to weigh if you want to allow employees to take bleisure trips or workcations. [You can review our comprehensive checklist here.](#)

Things become problematic in the following situations:

- Employees are taking **hush trips** without tell their employer that they are traveling at all.
- They may be taking it a step further by **quiet vacationing**, meaning they are doing the bare minimum to feign productivity when they are actually on vacation. They may be using “mouse movers” to appear active on company messaging systems and scheduling emails to be sent during business hours while they are actually sipping margaritas by the pool.

As with quiet quitting, [which you can read about here](#), the idea of quiet vacationing highlights the

importance of setting clear, measurable performance expectations and enforcing the company's policies consistently. Ignoring performance problems can have a detrimental impact on your business and on overall employee morale, so you should be prepared to take action if an employee is not performing to your expectations.

But you should also ask yourself why this is happening. An employee's hesitation to request time off may be a sign of deeper organizational issues that you need to address.

Why Are Workers Hiding Their Vacations?

While taking a break from work can help employees recharge, quiet vacationing can have negative consequences for employee well-being. They may fear getting caught, struggle to get necessary work done, and fail to reap the benefits of a true vacation. So why are employees quiet vacationing rather than using paid time off? Here are a few reasons employees provided to [a recent survey by the Harris Poll](#):

- Most respondents said they are happy with the amount of PTO their company provides but their company culture makes them afraid to use it.
- Most (78%) said they do not use the maximum amount of PTO allowed by their employer.
- The top barriers preventing workers from taking more time off are "pressure to always be available and responsive to demands" and "heavy workload."
- About half the respondents said they get nervous when requesting time off from their employer.
- Many feel guilty taking time off, fear the backlog when they return, and find it hard to disconnect.

These survey responses indicate that it's not enough to offer generous PTO policies. To improve morale and discourage quiet vacationing, you'll want to build a company culture that encourages employees to take meaningful time off and gives them the tools to be successful in their jobs when they return. Consider taking the steps below to boost your program.

Your 8-Step Plan to Strengthen Your PTO Policies

1. **Clearly Communicate Your Policies:** Make sure employees know how much vacation time they're earning, how to request time off, and any rules about when they can or can't take time off.
2. **Be Flexible:** Although many organizations have busy seasons when they need all hands on deck, try to be as flexible as possible and allow employees to take time off when they need it most.
3. **Encourage Employees to Unplug:** Send employees periodic reminders encouraging them to use their PTO and to disconnect from their job responsibilities as much as possible while they are away.
4. **Monitor for Workload Issues:** If certain employees aren't using their PTO, follow up with them individually to remind them of their PTO balance and address any potential workplace barriers. Is their workload overwhelming? Do they lack sufficient backup while they are out of the office?

Are employees cross-trained to share job responsibilities? Make sure employees have the support they need.

5. **Focus on Wellness:** Emphasize the importance of work-life balance and the health benefits of recharging through time away from work.
6. **Be Consistent:** Make sure everyone on the team has a fair opportunity to take time off. If you need coverage during popular vacation times, such as summer or winter holidays, develop a system for determining who gets priority. Your system will depend on your organization's particular needs, but some examples include a seniority system, lottery, rotation, or a first-come, first-served policy. You may also consider holding PTO planning meetings either at the beginning of the year or ahead of popular vacation times.
7. **Recognize Legal Obligations:** Don't forget that you may be legally required to approve time off in certain circumstances. For example, you may need to provide time off related to an employee's religious practice or observation, unless it would cause an undue hardship for the business. Additionally, in some states, like California, parents are entitled to time off to attend certain school activities. In Illinois, employers must follow certain steps when denying a request under the Paid Leave for All Workers Act. While there are exceptions to these rules, you should review the applicable requirements carefully and ensure compliance.
8. **Practice What You Preach:** Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you should lead by example to make an impact on company culture. If leaders are always working, employees may fear that taking time off is viewed negatively or as lacking commitment to the organization. Your leadership team, managers, and direct supervisors should all set the tone by taking their vacation time and disconnecting as much as possible.

Conclusion

We will continue to monitor developments in this area and provide updates as warranted, so make sure you are subscribed to [Fisher Phillips' Insight System](#) to get the most up-to-date information. For further information, contact the authors of this Insight or your Fisher Phillips attorney.

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