



Leave your laptop at home when you go for your next vacation

# That holiday to Bahamas can wait!

Before you go for your next vacation, think about the responsibilities you have at work

**SHE** shoved the envelope in front of the manager and uttered the two words "I'm leaving".

Looking a little perplexed, the manager was sure this was a happy employee. A few pleasantries later and with some amount of prodding, she spilt it, "I just don't have enough leave to go on my vacations."

Hold on. Before you jump to the conclusion that she's been overworked and underpaid, this 27-year-old has been on vacation twice, used up her paid leave and went on a third one on no-pay leave. In short, the job just got in the way of her vacations.

She was a talented junior executive in a creative design firm and the company felt that she had the potential to grow. They approved her no-pay leave to go on the last holiday, thinking that this could motivate her to work harder.

Wrong move. Believe it, this generation of employees is wired quite differently and has different priorities. They would probably have jumped at Richard Branson's so-called dream job that offered unlimited vacation without any hesitation.

A deal that seemed so good that even Branson himself didn't believe in it and called it the policy-that-isn't.

Here's his deal. *Time's* article "Quit Gushing: Richard Branson's Unlimited Vacation is a Trick" quoted Branson as saying: "The policy-that-isn't permits all salaried staff to take off whenever they want for as long as they want. There is no need to ask for prior approval and neither the employees themselves nor their managers are asked or expected to keep track of their days away from the office."

"It is left to the employee alone to decide if and when he or she feels like taking a few hours, a day, a week or a month off, the assumption being that they are only



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going to do it when they feel 100% comfortable that they and their team are up-to-date on every project and that their absence will not in any way damage the business – or, for that matter, their careers!"

The authors of this article, Peter T Coleman and Robert Ferguson, drew attention to the two last words – their careers. With the criterion of making sure not to damage the business or their careers, it would make every employee trepidatious before going on that unlimited vacation.

In reviewing the policy, Coleman and Ferguson found what makes it even less likely that the staff would take up the

offer was the high expectations Branson had of his employees, having recruited highly-motivated and responsible people, they are most unlikely to take unlimited vacation or even a short one

without staying connected to do project work.

In the case of the 27-year-old employee with a runaway wanderlust, she would have jumped at the chance without minding one bit the consequence of hurting the team project work that she might be involved with or the company business as a whole.

This is simply because there is the lack of ownership to task and responsibility to team. She displays a trait that is prone to the proverbial Gen Y that most organisations are struggling to manage.

We often hear managers complain about being held to ransom by employees who insist that their leave be approved because they have already purchased their air tickets. If this gets you to roll your eyes, my personal palm-to-forehead moment was when the staff told me that their parents had purchased the air tickets! While it is their right to apply for leave, the dates applied for are still subject to approval.

This, they do not realise or choose to ignore.

On the far end of this are staff who just accumulate their annual leave or even if they do take leave, would lug along their laptops and WiFi dongles so that they can take breaks during their vacation to do some work!

If they think this could move them a rung closer to the next promotion, they are also misguided. The lack of rest for both mind and body would not do the organisation any good as this would result in a drop in productivity or quality of work.

Employees who do not take leave will not be in a better stead with the company

or deemed any less if they do. The lack of rest or a break to re-energise will lead to a jaded mind and would definitely hamper creativity and an eye for detail.

Some of the reasons people take leave, besides going on vacation, are to spend time with the family, to chill and rest, to explore and learn or to study part-time. And some of the reasons employees do not take leave are when productivity are measured by setting target goals; when meeting sales targets would mean higher income.

For this group of employees, Branson's policy of unlimited vacation or the numerous public holidays that Malaysia is notorious for would not mean anything as they are compelled to push on to meet their targets. (Next year Malaysia will experience a record high number of long weekends.)

Managers, at all levels, need a skill to help employees strike a balance between responsibility and discipline at work and a healthy lifestyle. Responsibility to work and the team in this respect involves organising their leave days without disrupting workflow.

Some years back at D'Jungle People, we tried to balance accountability towards work and employee lifestyle by letting the employees decide when to take leave. This attempt failed miserably because the staff's high level of accountability at work prevented them from taking leave. Only the ones who were not top contributors ended up taking holidays as and when they liked.

The management had to enforce mandatory leave days to ensure that employees got enough rest.

As the spirit of paid leave is to allow employees to rest and time to do their own things, I believe the same can be achieved if we allow employees flexi-hours within the work structure.

The advent of digital technology has created virtual offices that have helped to enhance productivity, let employees stay connected and attend to emails more efficiently.

If employers have a trust issue with this system, then setting targets and goals with deadlines as a measure of productivity should sort that out.

So employers, you can now kick back, take a chill pill and relax. It's OK to let everyone fly so long as you can hear the hammer hit the high striker to ring in the target goals. **FocusM**

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