

YOUR VACATION REQUEST HAS BEEN DENIED!

KEEP WORKING UNTIL YOU REACH BURNOUT



By Steve McClatchy

An updated study by the jobsite Glassdoor revealed some startling statistics about vacations in America. Have you taken a vacation in the last 12 months? 54% of Americans have not. Do you work while you're on vacation? 66% of Americans do. These statistics have been steadily going up over the past four years since the study began. Why have we stopped taking vacations? When we finally do take a vacation why can't we unplug and stop working? People pass it off as dedication and perceived indispensability,

but it actually has more to do with fear. There were four major reasons cited as to why people who are given paid vacations don't use their vacation time.

- They don't want to fall behind at work. (34%)
- They are concerned that others won't do as good a job as they would do while they are away. (30%)
- They are afraid of a reputation of not being fully committed. (22%)
- They fear missing out on something while they are away. (21%)

Not vacationing and working while on your vacation are decisions that are rooted in fear. We are prioritizing the consequences we face, and/or might face, over the benefits. Are there benefits to a vacation to both the employer and the employee? Do they outweigh the costs? We need to consider them in order to see if organizations and bosses should support disconnected vacation time and if employees should take it.

The first benefit of a vacation is it helps to keep us from feeling burned out. You've been there, right? Burnout is a feeling we get when there is an absence of excitement for too long. When we close a big deal, earn a promotion or a raise, win an industry award, nail a big presentation, get a new job, or solve a problem that has been bothering us, we don't feel burned out. We are excited. The feeling of excitement preempts the feeling of burnout.

Desire is the emotion that drives the decisions which lead to excitement. Let me give you an example. I desire delivering a great presentation, so I prepare really hard, I nail the presentation, I receive the benefits of doing a great job, and then I feel accomplishment and excitement. Driving all of this hard work is the desire to enjoy these benefits. Fear, on the other hand, is the emotion that leads us to decisions that prevent consequences. Driving our decision to pay our bills is our fear of the consequences that will come from not paying them. Too much time (days/weeks/months/years) spent preventing consequences and not enough time gaining benefits leads to burnout.

The costs of vacations include the non-revenue-producing vacation time incurred by an employer and the actual price of a vacation for an employee. A business decision has to be made by weighing those actual costs against the benefits produced by taking time off to re-balance and re-charge and have something to be excited about. The weapon we

have against fear is desire. Vacations are exciting, that's why we desire them. If you go too long without excitement and desire in your life you'll end up burned out. What happens when a working professional gets burned out?

- * They fall behind on their work.
- * The quality of their work suffers.
- * People see them as not being committed.
- * They miss out on opportunities at work because they don't care about them.

Compare these outcomes to the reasons cited as to why people don't take vacations. They are exactly the same. In essence we create the very results we fear by not taking a vacation.

In the survey 80% of respondents said if their boss/organization actively encouraged vacations that they would take them. Why would a boss not encourage a vacation? It's a short-sighted decision prioritizing a short-term cost over a long-term gain of a more engaged employee. There are lots of studies that approximate the cost to a business of having a burned-out employee but we don't really need a study to tell us that. We have all reached burnout and been disengaged from our work. That's when we slow down, we cut corners, and we do the minimum. We don't go above and beyond, initiate improvements, introduce ideas, communicate effectively, or even just say thank you. We feel resentful and unappreciated. We don't feel recognized or valued.

So here are the reasons to take a vacation:

- 1 It helps you balance the fear and worry in your life with excitement and desire so you don't burn out.
- 2 It's a payoff for all your work to be able to enjoy time with the people you love. We sometimes have to take a step back and remember why we are working so hard and enjoy the fruits of that work with the people we care about most.
- 3 It's really silly not to. Not taking a week of paid vacation time which you have earned is just giving that money back to your employer by working for a week for free.
- 4 Taking a break allows you to be more creative. Allowing your subconscious mind to reset and think about your business and your life while you are at play helps you to be more creative, more innovative, and more effective.
- 5 The productivity surge you experience before you go on vacation has great benefits. As the excitement of the vacation approaches you stay focused, your speed increases, you avoid chit-

chat and small talk, you don't go down rabbit holes, drift on the web, or check social media. You see things through to completion so you are not bothered on your vacation and so you don't come back to unfinished work.

- 6 You lead by example by demonstrating that your family (or the significant people in your life) is a priority by defending time with them and being willing to fall behind on work because of them. When you don't take a vacation what you are saying to the people you care about the most is I fear the consequences of going on vacation more than I desire to spend time with you.

If you are in a leadership role and you consider the cost of a burned-out employee, the cost of losing a great employee, and the cost of a vacation, then your least expensive option is to support that your employees take vacations and then don't bother them with work until they get back.

Steve McClatchy is a keynote speaker and author of the award-winning New York Times Bestseller **Decide: Work Smarter, Reduce Your Stress & Lead by Example**. Decide has enjoyed global success and has been translated into 10 languages including Chinese, Russian, Japanese and Spanish. In every keynote speech and workshop Steve weaves insight, interaction, and actionable content with humor, inspiration and motivation. Over the past 16 years Steve has worked with the most prominent organizations in the world including Google, Under Armour, Disney, John Deere, Microsoft, NBC Universal, Accenture, HP, Tiffany's, Wells Fargo, Campbell's Soup and many teams in the NFL, NBA, NHL and MLB. He speaks frequently at Harvard, Wharton and Chicago Booth. He has appeared on CNBC, ABC, CBS, Fox News, WSJ TV and NBC's The Today Show and has been quoted in The Wall Street Journal, Fast Company, WebMD, Oprah Magazine, Entrepreneur and Investor's Business Daily. Steve's passion is for continual improvement and believes that when we stop growing, learning, gaining experience and achieving goals we stop living. For more information about Steve, visit: www.alleer.com.