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# Are your vacation days numbered?

## Time off is a way to avoid feeling burned out

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As a partner at a law firm, Don Marston can pretty much take as much vacation as he wants -- two weeks, four weeks even six months a year -- but he doesn't end up taking more than three weeks.

"I don't think I have ever taken all the vacation that has been available to me," said Marston, who practices workers' compensation and personal injury law in Bear. "Despite the fact that I have a terrific staff that does wonderful work for me, I know that if you don't tend to your client base, it is like a garden that after a while withers and dies."

As the year winds down, many workers will scramble to use up vacation days. But a growing number of Americans -- nearly a third -- will end up forgoing their vacation days because they they have too much work or responsibility to take off.

"With the downsizing and companies being leaner in terms of the staffing, ... companies are trying to do more with less, and people are busier than ever," said George Faulkner, a health and benefits principal at Mercer Human Resource Consulting. "It is more difficult to take the time off because it affects the work, and employees tend to feel guilty about it."

Americans are likely to give back 574 million vacation days in 2006, worth about \$75.72 billion based on workers' average hourly wage, according to Expedia.com's 2006 Vacation Deprivation survey. On average, Americans will give up four vacation days this year, one more than last year.

"Vacation deprivation in America is at an all-time high," Sally McKenzie, vice president and general manager at Expedia.com, said in a statement. "There are credible health and wellness benefits associated with time off from work. Americans should take a cue from their foreign counterparts and relish the vacation they earn."

The Expedia.com survey, which included the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Germany, France and Australia, found that Americans have the least amount of vacation -- 14 days -- and forgo more of it. The French had the most vacation with 39 days off, and 40 percent of them took three- to four-week vacations during the summer, compared with the one-week getaway that 40 percent of Americans take.

Experts say Americans are not fully taking advantage of their vacations because they are more insecure about their jobs. Some of them feel that if they take all their vacation, especially in large chunks, they will be looked upon negatively by their boss.

Sometimes workers simply want the overtime. But the extra hours may cost them their health, and in the long term, affect the quality of their work, experts said.

Some Delaware companies have developed flexible vacation policies that allow workers to carry over vacation days into the following year, or have it accrue in a bank for a given period. Others are more often reminding workers how many days of vacation they have left.

"We do have a carry-over policy," said Bill Benintende, spokesman for Wilmington Trust. "Having the policy gives you

some flexibility if for whatever reason you can't use all the time you have got."

The company allows full-time workers with four weeks of vacation to transfer four days into the next year. Employees with 15 or more years at Wilmington Trust can transfer 10 days into the following year. If they don't take the days the following year, they surrender them.

Some larger companies make sure their workers get a break by actually shutting down for the holiday at the end of the year.

"It is wonderful having the time off during the holidays," said Alice Petitt, who works in the communications department at General Motors Corp. in Newport.

The GM plant shuts down between Dec. 22 and Jan. 2. As a bonus, which was negotiated by the union, this time off is not deducted from workers' vacations; it is recorded as a holiday.

"A company, if it doesn't encourage people to take vacation, is really shooting itself in the foot," said Mark Sincevich, a work life consultant based in Bethesda, Md. "People are going to be burned-out and leave the company."

Sincevich said if workers don't have time away from work to relax they will be less productive, less creative and less healthy.

"As a matter of principle, I take it and go away with the family," said Akinwale Ojomo, a specialist at Citibank's global loan operation in New Castle. "It's very beneficial because we need to take the time away from work and unwind because that way, when we come back, we can be more productive."

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