

Companies should prepare to handle a slew of vacation requests this summer

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees decided against taking paid time off. Some stockpiled PTO in order to receive a payout if they were let go by their employer. Others saved their days for the future when travel and other recreational activities would resume.

Though the pandemic is not over, people are starting to change their outlook. The improving economy gives workers a greater sense of job security and a decreased need to hoard PTO. As vaccination numbers grow, everything from visiting family on the opposite coast to catching a movie and dinner becomes a possibility. Add to this the normal desire to shake off winter and enjoy fun in the sun, and it's easy to see how companies seem destined for a surge in PTO requests.

While everyone welcomes movement toward normalcy, leaders do face a challenging situation. How does the organization keep running while accommodating employees rightly wanting to use their PTO?



Start the process early

Don't wait until you have a pile of PTO requests to begin thinking about what to do. Inform staff that the company will do its best to accommodate, but it needs to balance time off with keeping the business afloat. Encourage people to apply early to avoid denial, especially if they have their hearts set on certain dates. This

will allow adequate time to work out arrangements between employees.

Gather information

How much PTO do employees have on the books? Where might coverage problems arise? Adam P. Gordon, co-founder of [PTO Genius](#), suggests analyzing the last 15 months for a clear picture of where things stand.

“Speak to managers and leaders to identify which departments or employees have taken the least amount of time off and prioritize them,” Gordon says. “Determine how the ebbs and flows of their department can define things like blackout dates, as some departments get busier during certain times of the year. You want to account for that because you don’t want to encourage employees to take time off during those dates.”

Create a master schedule

Give everyone viewing access to a central PTO calendar. Block out days the company needs all hands on deck. If a predetermined number of staff members can take off on a given day, put in availability slots. Fill in these openings as time gets approved.

Promote teamwork

Some workers are flexible about when to take time off. They simply would like a few days but can shift the actual dates without a problem. Others really desire specific times. They might want to attend a family reunion or make their vacation days overlap with those of a spouse.

Encourage employees to work together on arrangements. Kindly shifting one’s ambiguous plans so that a colleague can claim the spot she highly covets builds morale and interpersonal bonds.

Notice competition brewing for particular days, such as before or after the Fourth of July? See if some parties might back down in return for first dibs on equally popular days during the Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons.

Expand duties

Employers sometimes get reluctant to let staff members with similar responsibilities take off at the same time. If such a situation is keeping managers from granting PTO requests, now might be a great time to train others on these critical tasks. You’ll widen the pool of who can pick up the slack when co-workers are out, and learning new skills promotes employee engagement.

Avoid making unreasonable demands

Managers oftentimes rely heavily on certain employees. When these people are out, the office especially feels their absence. The temptation exists to limit when these critical team members can use their PTO. However, they likely need the break more than anyone, and it’s in the company’s best interest to make sure they get it.

“Identify key employees, or your linchpins,” Gordon says. “Every organization has one or several — that person who knows everything about a department. If they can’t take off, they’ll get burned out, and it’s detrimental. If you lose them, the whole department could be crippled for weeks or months.”

Revise expectations

As the nation keeps heading toward a return to normalcy, businesses may see the coming months as a time to ramp up productivity or add new projects. While it’s natural to want to surge ahead, progress cannot come at the expense of denying worker’s PTO.

People experienced an abundance of stress during the pandemic, and they deserve to relax. Companies that make employee well-being a top concern right now will reap benefits in the long run.

“Employees who do not take their allotted time will eventually experience more stress-related symptoms such as mood swings, racing thoughts, frustration, irritability, pessimism, more headaches, sleep difficulties, and gastrointestinal disorders,” says resiliency and wellness expert Beverly Beuermann-King of [Work Smart Live Smart](#). “Just like a car engine, people need regular maintenance. Vacations help to restore focus, energy, creativity, productivity, and engagement in their jobs which positively impacts the corporate bottom line.”