Tips for Effective and Supported Use of Paid Time Off

Time off is vital to individual and organizational wellbeing. Harvard is committed to ensuring that employees understand how time off contributes not only to our physical and emotional health, but also to improved work performance. As well as being a valuable component of the total rewards Harvard provides, time away from work reduces symptoms of burnout and is an important driver toward a culture and mindset shift that supports a healthy balance of work and personal priorities:

- Identify mission critical projects and prioritize those to avoid a constant state of urgency
- Reframe and set healthy expectations around responsiveness
- Be thoughtful and respectful of colleagues' time away and re-entry time

Managers

- ✓ Lead by example, take time off
- ✓ Utilize the delay delivery function in email to avoid sending requests during others' time off and after work hours
- ✓ Know your own vacation balance and that of your direct reports (including future time off plans)
- ✓ Link vacation use to workplace wellness and get staff involved
- ✓ Provide deadlines by which to take advantage of these options with time to plan
- ✓ Get the whole team involved in planning for vacation use and work coverage; use a shared team time off schedule
- ✓ Support the notion of "it can wait" when team members are out of office; staff should not be expected to fully cover their own work and that of their colleagues
- ✓ Add vacation use to every performance discussion
- ✓ Remove barriers and ensure clients and stakeholders are aware of and support this initiative
- ✓ Support use of impromptu days (requiring less planning) if work allows
- ✓ Encourage creative thinking about how best to use time off
- ✓ Value work life balance and praise healthy boundary setting, rather than an "always on" mentality
- ✓ Ask staff what their plans are for recharging after completion of large projects or events

All Staff

- ✓ Get creative and don't be afraid to talk about upcoming plans
- ✓ Ensure your manager is aware and has approved your time away
- ✓ Respect others' time out of the office and be thoughtful about requests (e.g., hold off on requests until they return, consider using delayed delivery in email)
- ✓ Set boundaries—before responding to an email while on vacation, assess whether it is truly necessary
- ✓ Redefine the notion of vacation and consider shorter durations
- ✓ Use detailed out of office messages and coordinate who will cover
- ✓ Remove distractions while away by turning off notifications for Outlook, MS Teams, Slack, etc. from all personal devices
- ✓ Sign out of Microsoft Teams so people don't think you are working while accessing your computer for personal reasons while away
- ✓ Leverage [Viva Insights](#) in Outlook (can be found at the top right of your Outlook toolbar) to support mindful email usage
- ✓ Pack only personal devices while on vacation

Vacation Use Suggestions

- ✓ Explore extending winter recess or holiday weekends either before or after the break
- ✓ Plan to add an extra day before or after vacation to ease transition away from and back to work
- ✓ Encourage taking the same week as leadership in a school/unit/department if feasible
- ✓ Plan with your team for everyone to use vacation time to create a 4-day workweek during a given period (e.g., 6-10 weeks); discuss rotating the day for fairness (Mondays and Fridays will be popular)
- ✓ Use smaller increments of time if a week away feels overwhelming:
    - ▪ Use half days creatively
    - ▪ Take a day off in the middle of the week
- ✓ Make vacation part of Workplace Wellness, encourage taking time off
- ✓ Leverage any other creative ideas that work for your team and your work

Sources/Relevant Articles

[Managers, Encourage Your Team to Take Time Off](#)
[15 Ways to Unplug Completely on Vacation](#)