Out of Office Culture Report

May 2024 • The Harris Poll Thought Leadership Practice
Methodology

This report is based on a custom survey that was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll between April 26th to 28th, among 1,170 employed adults aged 18 and over.

This research comprises of 166 Gen Z (ages 18-27), 486 Millennials (ages 28-43), 365 Gen X (ages 44-59), and 153 Boomers (ages 60 and older). This research is also broken down by title of role at the company, comprising of 177 C-suite employees, 210 upper management employees, 272 middle management employees, and 511 employees in other roles. The survey also includes 259 remote employees (who work 100% from home), 324 hybrid employees (work a mixture of in the office and at home), and 587 in-person employees (work 100% from the office).
Executive Summary

Policy isn’t the issue: workplace culture and workload pressures dictate America’s paid time off usage

- The majority of Americans (83%) are satisfied with their company’s paid time off/vacation policy; 60% are given more than 10 paid days off per year, an additional 7% have an “unlimited vacation policy.”
  - A third of American workers indicate “unlimited vacation policy” means more than 30 days off.
- However, most (78%) do not use the maximum amount of paid time off allowed by their employer. In fact, the average American worker took 15 paid days off last year, despite half (49%) being allowed more than that by their employer.
- The top barriers preventing workers from taking more time off are “pressure to always be available and responsive to demands” (31%) and “heavy workload” (30%).
- Employers aren’t helping the narrative, as 76% of workers say, “I wish my workplace culture placed a stronger emphasis on the value of taking regular breaks and utilizing paid time off.”
  - The anxiety-ridden culture around the request is prevalent, as half (49%) get nervous when requesting time off from their employer.

There’s no rest for the wicked! (even if they are “out of office”)

- Although 62% of the American workforce say, “being ‘out of office’ means absolutely no working,” nearly the same amount (60%) admit that they struggle to “fully disconnect” when they can take their time off.
- Most American workers (86%) say they would check emails from their boss while on paid time off/vacation, and more than half (56%) have taken work-related calls during their time off.
- Guilt and anticipatory angst rule their vacation days: Two-thirds (66%) of American workers dread the backlog of work awaiting their return, with nearly half (47%) feeling guilty when taking their time off.

Longing for a break, the workforce aspires to use the paid time off they do take for a relaxing escape

- Last year, American workers took paid time off for vacation (47%), followed by health and wellness (19%).
- Three in four (79%) prioritize using their paid time off/vacation days to relax and recharge rather than for other activities.
- In their ideal paid time off day, Americans would prioritize rest and relaxation (65%) and quality time with loved ones (50%). Their ideal location to spend the day would be on the beach (37%), followed by a city within the US (19%) and their couch/bed (17%).
  - “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” is the anthem of their ideal paid time off day (29%), followed by “The Lazy Song” (19%).
The state of paid time off in America

Corporate policy vs. corporate culture
Most employed Americans are satisfied with their company’s paid time off policy, with over half allowed between 11 and 30 days per year.

- **Amount of paid time off allowed by company (work days/year)**
  - None: 11%
  - 10 or fewer: 20% Non-mgmt
  - 11 to 20: 34%
  - 21 to 30: 22% White
  - More than 30: 7% "Unlimited"
  - 14% Remote

- **32% of American workers indicate “unlimited vacation policy” means more than 30 days off per year**
- **29% indicate 11 to 20 days**

- **83% American Workers**
  - 91% 21+ paid days off
  - 88% Hybrid
  - 85% Men | 79% Women
  - 87% $100K+

- **87%** Remote

VAC01 How many paid time off days does your company allow you to take per year? (employed; n=1,170) | VAC05 How satisfied are you with your company's paid time off / vacation policy? (company offers paid time off; n=1,026) (Top 2 Box) | VAC11 Regardless of your current paid time off / vacation policy. How many days off per year does "Unlimited Paid Time Off / Vacation Policy" mean to you? (employed; n=1,170)
Three in four, especially younger workers, do not use the maximum amount of paid time off — in fact, it’s an aspiration for the majority.

78% American Workers

Do not use the maximum amount of paid time off / vacation days allowed by their employer.

- 89% Gen Z
- 85% Upper management
- 83% Millennials

75% American Workers

“I wish I were able to take all of my available days off.”

- 83% Upper management
- 82% Urban
- 80% Millennials
Pressure to be available and heavy workload are top barriers from taking more time, Gen Z and Millennials fear employer reaction and career implications

Barriers to taking more paid time off / vacation days
% selected among those who receive paid time off

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pressure to always be available and responsive to work demands</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy workload</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilt about leaving colleagues to cover my workload</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of missing out on important opportunities or developments at work</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern about perception by boss/employer</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support or encouragement from my employer</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of impacting raise / promotion prospects</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A - Uses the maximum amount of PTO</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

63% American Workers
“The pressure to meet deadlines and maintain productivity often deters me from taking extended time away from work.”
73% Upper management
71% Millennials

49% American Workers
“I get nervous when requesting paid time off / vacation days from my employer.”
61% Millennials
58% Gen Z
Millennials’ fear of taking time off has made them culprits of out of office workarounds, including mouse moves and playing hooky.

### Out of Office Workarounds

**Out of office workarounds % Millennials have done**

- **38%** Millennial Workers have “moved their mouse” to maintain online status on company’s messaging system (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Slack, etc.)
- **37%** Millennial Workers have taken time off without communicating it to their manager / employer (i.e., be out of office without officially being "out of office")
- **37%** Millennial Workers have scheduled a message to send outside of regular hours to give the impression they’re working extra hours.

**Breakdown by Generation**

- **31% Total**
  - 30% Gen Z
  - 29% Gen X
  - 20% Boomers
- **28% Total**
  - 24% Gen Z
  - 24% Gen X
  - 18% Boomers
- **30% Total**
  - 27% Gen Z
  - 24% Gen X
  - 26% Boomers
As workplace pressures heighten, workers crave vacation—but for half, it’s a luxury they can’t afford.

81% American Workers

“As work becomes more stressful, my urge to take a vacation becomes stronger.”

86% Northeast

77% Men | 85% Women

50% American Workers

“Taking time off from work is a luxury I cannot afford.”

63% <$50K

62% No paid time off

59% Millennials

57% Black

57% HS education or less

57% Urban
Beating the imbalance: The American workforce is calling to their employers to focus on the culture around taking paid time off, not the policy.

76% American Workers

“I wish my workplace culture placed a **stronger emphasis on the value of taking regular breaks** and utilizing paid time off.”

85% 10 days or fewer paid time off
73% Men | 80% Women

65% American Workers

“I find **striking a balance** between work commitments and personal time off to be challenging.”

74% Upper management
74% Millennials
72% Hybrid
71% Urban
62% Men | 70% Women
Out of sight, not out of mind

The realities of taking time off in the American workplace
In a culture that glorifies being busy, Americans are consistently connected – even outside of work hours

85% American Workers

“America has a culture that glorifies being busy.”

89% Millennials
89% Northeast
83% Men | 88% Women

Work-related activities while outside of work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>% have done</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respond to work-related messages or emails outside of regular hours</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Check email / work messages on your phone while out to lunch</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond to urgent work requests outside of regular hours</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend work-related events outside regular hours</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in work-related training or development outside of work hours</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VAC06 Which of the following workplace actions have you done? (employed; n=1,170) | VAC08 How much do you agree or disagree with the following? (employed; n=1,170) (Top 2 Box)
OUT OF OFFICE CULTURE

When it comes to being “out of office,” many say that means absolutely no working, yet most struggle to disconnect and end up logging in on vacation.

62% American Workers

“Being ‘out of office’ means absolutely no working. No exceptions.”

69% Democrats
58% Men | 66% Women

60% American Workers

“I struggle to fully disconnect during my time off.”

56% have taken work-related calls or meetings during their time off

64% C-Suite
55% Hybrid
47% Upper management
45% 21+ PTO days

37% have worked from a third location while on vacation
(i.e., coffee shop, hotel)
Almost nine in 10 employed Americans say they would check an email from their boss, even when on PTO or vacation.

86% American Workers

Would check an email from their boss while on paid time off / vacation.

95% Gen Z
95% Upper management

Subject lines that would entice workers to open their email during their paid time off (email sent by boss)

- "Urgent: Need your help" 54%
- "Client needs the report. Do you have it?" 37%
- "Can you send me ____?" 34%
- "Kudos to you! Great job!" 32%
- "Project update: See Revised Timeline" 29%
- "Weekly Company Update" 25%
- "Free lunch in the break room!" 18%
- "Team Building Event Feedback Survey" 17%
- "Zombie Apocalypse Preparedness Drill: Team Mobilization Required" 13%
- Absolutely nothing will make me open an email from my boss during my paid time off 14%
Even if they’re not physically connected, anticipatory angst of the work to come and guilt weight on the minds of many American Workers.

66%

“I dread the backlog of work awaiting my return from my time off.”

78% Upper management
74% Middle management
72% Urban

47%

“I feel guilty when I take paid time off / vacation days.”

59% Upper management
56% Gen Z
55% Hispanic
53% Millennials
Aspiring to relax

The American workforces’ ideal day off
Last year, the average employed Americans took 15 paid days off, top use cases are vacation, followed by health and wellness.

The average employed American took **15 paid time off / vacation days** last year. (there are ~260 working days / year)

### How they spent their time off

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vacations</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and wellness</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., sick days, doctor appointments, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental responsibilities</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family commitments</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g., weddings, birthdays, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency situations</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VAC02 How many paid time off / vacation days did you take last year? Please include only working days (Monday - Friday) in your assessment. | VAC03 Thinking about the number of paid time off days you took last year, please tell us what percentage of this time off was allocated to each of the following. (company offers time off; n=1,043)
The classic “R&R” is truly what employed Americans want the most when taking time off, followed by quality time with loved ones.
For many, an ideal day off would be spent on the beach or exploring a city and they’d spend it with their significant other or families.

72% of employed Americans agree, “Given that everything is already planned (e.g., accommodation, food, etc.), the thought of going on a cruise sounds more enticing than ever.”
“Don’t Worry, Be Happy” is the favorite anthem to an ideal vacation day, with Bruno Mars’ hit “The Lazy Song” in a solid second place.

The anthem of the workforces’ ideal paid day off:

- **29%**: "Don’t Worry, Be Happy" by Bobby McFerrin
- **19%**: "The Lazy Song" by Bruno Mars
- **15%**: "Empire State of Mind" by Jay-Z and Alicia Keys
- **14%**: "Lost in Japan" by Shawn Mendes
- **14%**: "Cake by the Ocean" by DNCE
- **14%**: "On The Road Again" by Willie Nelson
- **11%**: "Empire State of Mind" by Jay-Z and Alicia Keys
- **6%**: "Empire State of Mind" by Jay-Z and Alicia Keys
- **7%**: Other

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enjoyment</th>
<th>R&amp;R</th>
<th>Road Trip</th>
<th>Big City Visit</th>
<th>Beach Time</th>
<th>International Vacation</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40% Boomers+ 33% Women</td>
<td>18% White</td>
<td>21% C-Suite 21% Upper mgmt 20% Gen Z 19% Democrat</td>
<td>16% Upper mgmt</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix
A gap in the system: the American workforce isn’t taking their time off

Amount of paid time off given vs. amount of paid time off taken

- **Time allowed by employer**
- **Time taken last year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time allowed by employer</th>
<th>Time taken last year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5 days</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 days</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 days</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 days</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 days</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30 days</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 30 days</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VAC01 How many paid time off days does your company allow you to take per year? (employed; n=1,170)
VAC02 How many paid time off / vacation days did you take last year? (company offers time off; n=1,026)
The youngest generation and the lowest earners took the least amount of days off last year, signaling slimmer margins for certain groups of employed Americans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>Number of paid days off taken last year (Average including zero)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gen Z</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen X</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boomers+</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOUSEHOLD INCOME</th>
<th>Number of paid days off taken last year (Average including zero)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; $50K</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50K - $99K</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100K+</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>Number of paid days off taken last year (Average including zero)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION LEVEL</th>
<th>Number of paid days off taken last year (Average including zero)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HS or less</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>Number of paid days off taken last year (Average including zero)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People of color</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOB TITLE</th>
<th>Number of paid days off taken last year (Average including zero)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C-Suite</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper mgmt</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle mgmt</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Over half of employed Americans say “Unlimited PTO” policies mean more than 20 days, but those who have it take less than that.

Perceptions of “Unlimited Paid Time Off / Vacation Policy”

# days off an unlimited vacation policy entails

- 0-5 days: 7%
- 6-10 days: 13%
- 11-15 days: 15%
- 16-20 days: 15%
- 21-25 days: 10%
- 26-30 days: 9%
- More than 30 days: 32%
- 50% Boomers+

The average employed American with an “unlimited paid time off” took 18 days off last year.
15 days among all employed.

VAC11 Regardless of your current paid time off / vacation policy. How many days off per year does “Unlimited Paid Time Off / Vacation Policy” mean to you? Please select one. (employed; n=1,170)
VAC02 How many paid time off / vacation days did you take last year? Please include only working days (Monday - Friday) in your assessment. If you are unsure, please estimate to the best of your knowledge. (company offers time off; n=1,026)
More paid time off leads to more productive employees

66% American Workers

“If my workplace provided more paid days off, I would be a more productive employee.”

77% Urban
75% Millennials
74% Democrats
Amount of paid time off is a top factor when considering a new job, almost half would sacrifice a higher salary for more days.

48% American Workers

“I’d rather have more paid days off than a higher salary.”

57% Upper management
56% C-Suite
56% Millennials
53% South, Urban

Most important factors when considering a new job
% ranked 1-3

1. Salary 80%
2. Healthcare benefits 56%
3. Paid time off / vacation policy 49%
4. Work environment policy (e.g., remote, hybrid, in-office, etc.) 41%
5. Corporate culture (e.g., work-life balance, co-workers, etc.) 33%
6. Childcare opportunities 20%*
7. Educational stipends (i.e., paying for higher education, certifications, etc.) 17%
8. Other 8%

*among parents
A proven approach for building credible and authentic brand authority

Building on 50+ years of experience pulsing societal opinion, we design research that is credible, creative, and culturally relevant. Give your pitches an edge with custom information designed by research experts.