

The importance of taking Paid Time Off (PTO) *Especially during a pandemic*

For over half a year we have continued to cope during a worldwide pandemic. COVID-19 has proved to be an ongoing, new addition to our lives.

Research shows that we are resilient and programmed to gradually improve when faced with issues such as grief/loss, traumatic injuries/illnesses, divorce, job loss, combat deployment and even terrorist attacks (Bonanno et al. 2012). However, when faced with a similar challenge such as SARS our ability to bounce back does not improve with time. (Bonanno et al. 2008)

A recent article by “Newsweek Magazine” (Piore, Adam, 2020) titled, **“The Mental Health Toll from the Coronavirus Could Rival that of the Disease itself,”** stated three, arising and major mental health concerns to be aware of from COVID-19: 1) suicide, 2) domestic violence and, 3) opioid/drug abuse. We are also seeing an increase in anxiety, depression, anger, stress, marital discord and alcohol or other substance abuse.

At the same time, we are also seeing a decrease in the use of voluntary PTO. A poll done by Glassdoor found that only half of employees (54%) had used any of their paid vacation time in the previous 12 months. The study showed that employees who had paid vacation didn’t use up to 75% of their allotted vacation time. (Glassdoor Survey)

You would assume the use of PTO would be the opposite, due to increased stress and uncertainty in the workplace. Stress is correlated to more American’s working from home with its challenges of balancing work, parenting and home issues. Uncertainty is associated with the many downsizing and restructurings taking place in workplaces throughout America. The uncertainty in the workplace gives us an idea as to why some employees are hoarding their PTO. Fear of downsizings, mandatory use of PTO, and constant trepidation about losing one’s job could be some reasons for not using PTO.

At a time where stress is high at work, the need for employees to take that break from work is even more important. Mental health professionals are recommending that we use our PTO and take time off to rejuvenate our minds and bodies. We need to allow ourselves to relax which is crucial for our mental, physical and spiritual health.

Studies have shown that:

- **Health improves:** People who work more than 55 hours per week are 33% more likely to have a stroke and 13% more likely to have a heart attack. (Mika Kivimäki, PhD; et al).
- **Productivity improves:** Working more than 48 hours a week makes you less productive. (Pencavel, John)
- **Stress is reduced:** A vacation allows your brain to recover from work-related stress and gives your brain a chance to recover. Taking one day (24 hours) off allows our brains to rest and rejuvenate. (European Society of Cardiology)

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- **Live longer:** 40-year study found that people who regularly took a vacation lived longer than those who did not. (European Society of Cardiology)
- **Trust improves:** An important principle in the workplace. Taking PTO and totally disconnecting from your job (meaning not bringing your laptop, checking emails, calling in) shows your coworkers that you trust them.
- **Engagement improves:** After taking PTO you return to work more engaged and energized than before.

To summarize, pandemics are hard; emotionally and physically hard. By using your PTO you will be healthier, happier, live longer and be a better employee when you return.

If you need extra support, counseling or resources to help you maintain emotional stability in your life, please call **Profile EAP at 800-645-6571**. We are here to help.

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