

# America's Workaholic Culture: Unused Vacations are at a Forty-Year High

Lynn White October 04, 2016



**Four in every ten working Americans do not get to use all of their vacation day entitlement, resulting in almost 170 million working days going unclaimed.**

([Newswire.net](#) -- October 4, 2016) -- The number of unused vacation days amongst American workers is at its highest level for some forty years, prompting speculation as to whether it is just confirmation of a strong work ethic and culture, or whether there are other reasons, such as being too uneasy about taking the time away.

If you have an accident at work and have to consult someone like [Gersowitz Libo & Korek PC](#) to help with your claim, that will be one good reason why you spend time away from your job, but when it comes to simply using the vacation time you are entitled to, it seems that too many of us have a workaholic culture.

## The figures point to a worrying trend

There is no hiding from the facts and figures that are available, which are that four in every ten working Americans do not get to use up all of their vacation day entitlement, resulting in almost 170 million working days going unclaimed.

The research team at Oxford Economics who were hired to investigate this phenomenon, not only came up with what might be considered by many as an alarming number of unclaimed days, the same researchers also put an estimate on the value of those lost benefits at about \$52 billion.

Putting these figures into some sort of context, it amounts to each American worker missing out on about five paid vacation days each year.

## Taking the blame

You might think that the blame for this huge amount of [unclaimed vacation time](#) might fall at the feet of overbearing employers who make it difficult for their workers to take time off easily, but that would mostly seem to be an unfair accusation, as there is definitely a workaholic culture to factor into the argument.

In response to the record high volume of unused vacation days, there are a number of employers who are trying to take a proactive approach to the problem, creating an environment that is designed to encourage employees to claim the personal time they are entitled to.

Despite these initiatives, it appears that many workers still manage to feel guilty about taking time off and tend to procrastinate when it comes to getting around to actually booking that time off.

## Signs of weakness

The global financial crisis certainly didn't help workers to relax about the security of their employment, and it may well have been a situation that increased their anxieties about taking time off.

There are definitely signs of a culture in the workplace which is almost a siege mentality and viewed as a fight for survival of the fittest, meaning that some might view taking a vacation as a sign of weakness or lack of commitment to the cause.

Even when some workers are finally persuaded to take some vacation time, many might spend their time away experiencing feelings of guilt and stressing about work piling up for when they get back.

## Taking vacation time seriously

The United States is the only industrialized country that does not mandate vacation days, and a quarter of the workforces don't receive any whatsoever.

That alone would suggest that the country as a whole don't really have much of a serious or positive attitude towards vacation time. Such is the extent of the problem that even when a new initiative was introduced, titled Take Back Your Time, which aimed to reduce the number of unclaimed vacation days by at least 20%, it could be argued that there is still a general mood of apathy towards making positive changes.

The average American worker currently works nine full weeks, which is equivalent to 350 hours, longer than their Western European counterparts. That is a big disparity, and you can find plenty of other glaring contradictions to the American working culture, including the French for example, who still uphold a long tradition of operating a 35-hour working week.

### **Changing attitudes**

It is going to be an uphill challenge to change a workaholic culture that is truly ingrained, but one way of maybe achieving that aim would be start at the top in terms of setting an example.

Perhaps if CEO's and other senior management figures actively encourage vacation time and are seen to be taking time out themselves, with the message that it could be beneficial to both the workforce and the company, this positive attitude might trickle down into the rest of the workforce.

It might even make some inroads into that huge number of unclaimed vacation days.

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