

## SUCCESS

# How to make unlimited PTO work

Set expectations, trust your employees

By DAVID TOMÁS Inc.

What do you think of when you hear "unlimited vacation policy"? Do images of employees lounging on the beach, blissfully ignoring their deadlines pop into your head? Or perhaps it's the opposite: overworked employees unsure when they can take time off and afraid of taking more than a couple of weeks off.

Lately, there's been a lot of chatter about the benefits of unlimited paid time off, but few practical guides to how to really make this policy work.

I've offered an unlimited vacation policy in my company since 2012. Over the years, I've learned how to make this policy work for my employees and my business. Here are my top tips for successfully implementing an open vacation policy.

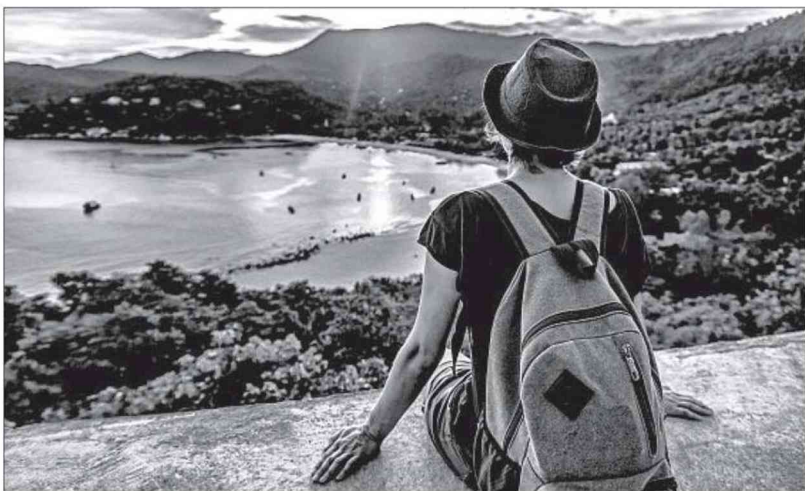
## Establish a culture of company happiness

The success of unlimited PTO depends mostly on the existing culture within your company. After all, a happy office is a functioning office, and because we spend the majority of our waking hours at work, we should strive to make them as enjoyable as possible.

This outlook not only makes unlimited vacation more effective, but it also helps with the day-to-day functioning of the office.

So how do you create a culture of happiness? My first recommendation is to shift the focus on time-in vs. time-out, and instead concentrate on accomplishments and objectives. Consider offering flexible work hours and more work-from-home days.

Imagine a company that offers unlimited vacation, yet is strict on ensuring employees clock in from 9 to 5 every day. Such rigid attention to time will cause those em-



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ployees to distrust their vacation policy. This could result in burn-out, employees taking fewer vacation days than they deserve or experiencing guilt when they do decide to take a vacation.

Additionally, take a look at your company's core values, and honestly assess whether you're functioning in a way that encourages flexibility and freedom. One of our core values is admiring people, and this policy is just one of the ways we show our employees how much we value them.

## Set clear expectations

Along with being happy, your employees also want to be trusted. And it takes a lot of trust on both sides to make an open vacation policy work. Use two-way communication to establish

trust and set clear expectations.

Before implementing a new policy, have an open dialogue with your employees, and set expectations about what is and isn't reasonable.

Let's say your company typically hosts a big event in March. Obviously, an employee taking a two-week vacation right before the big event would not be practical.

Establish a method for communicating about work and expectations. Setting clear standards helps to reduce the chance of employees not taking any vacation or feeling guilty when they do. It also helps to ensure the policy isn't abused.

So, you've had the conversation. Now what? Create an easy way for employees to request what days they want to take off.

At our company, we use a shared Google calendar. Let each team determine how they want to handle a team member's absence. An employee's vacation shouldn't leave the rest of their team hanging or any pressing business unfinished.

## Lead by example

Encourage C-suite members, managers and even yourself to take well-deserved vacation time. Unlimited vacation is not a "do as I say, not as I do" policy. It applies to everyone. When the leaders of your company buy into this idea, employees on all levels will feel more comfortable requesting time off themselves.

This past summer, I worked remotely in Ireland for eight weeks. During three of those

weeks, I took a vacation. I spent time with my family, disconnected for a bit and just relaxed.

When I came back to the office I was re-energized, more productive and refocused. Vacations are not a privilege; they're essential for your employees to be successful and happy at work.

When employees feel trusted and satisfied, they work harder to contribute toward the overall success of the company. I'm happy to say our PTO policy has had positive effects on our culture and productivity, even helping us to win a great-places-to-work award two years in a row.

David Tomás is the CEO of Cyberclick, a digital marketing agency, and author of "The Happiest Company in the World" and "Diary of a Millennial."

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