

Should staff have unlimited holidays?

Level: Intermediate–advanced

Timing: 90 minutes plus

Summary: This lesson explores the question of whether staff should have unlimited holidays. In this lesson, students will:

1. discuss holiday entitlements in their workplace;
2. read one of two texts, either in favour of or against unlimited holidays;
3. take part in a role-play meeting to decide whether to implement unlimited holidays;
4. write an email informing their company of their decision;
5. discuss whether unlimited holidays could be introduced at their workplace.

Material needed: One copy of the worksheet per student, including one copy of either sheet A or sheet B per student and a final page with the remaining questions, applicable for all of the students; one copy of the vocabulary record per student

Group size: Any

Overview

This lesson plan for both pre-experience and in-work business students is based around an original article first published in Business Spotlight Issue 1/2015.

Warmer

Hand out sheet A to half of the students and sheet B to the other half. Ask students to discuss the questions. They aim to introduce the topic of holiday entitlement and encourage students to talk about how this is allocated and booked at their place of work.

Key words

Hand out the article sheet A to half of the students and the article sheet B to the other half. Students read their definitions and find the key words and phrases in the article.

Key:

2A

1. founders; 2. start-ups; 3. handle; 4. entrepreneur; 5. concept;
6. exhausted; 7. guilty; 8. conflict; 9. resentment;
10. frustration; 11. abuse; 12. fire

2B

1. enlightened; 2. policy; 3. bureaucracy; 4. contrary to;
5. industry; 6. nine-to-five; 7. labels; 8. honeymoon;
9. absenteeism; 10. staff losses; 11. trend; 12. co-founder

Expressions

Students put the words in the correct order to make expressions from the text they have just read. They should then discuss the meanings of the expressions and how they are used.

Key:

3A

1. take advantage of – unfairly get what you want from someone who is easily persuaded to help you, trust you or do things for you
2. holding up the team – causing a delay for colleagues
3. punch above their weight – achieve more than you would expect them to
4. move the ball forward – keep completing tasks efficiently and then moving on to other tasks
5. far from ideal – not very good
6. gone so far as to – done something that is considered extreme

3B

1. get rid of – throw away; not follow any more
2. did away with – got rid of
3. take advantage of – use a situation or opportunity to get what you want
4. pull together – work together to achieve something
5. pull a sickie – pretend you are ill and not go to work
6. take a day off – take a day's holiday from work

Meeting

Students hold a meeting to decide whether or not to implement unlimited holidays in their company. Ideally, they will work in teams of four or six students. If there is an odd number of students, then assign one student the task of observer. (See the teaching and learning strategy below.)

Appoint a chair in each group who will lead the meeting. Make sure at least one person makes notes of any decisions made so that the group can give feedback to the class.

The students' position at this meeting, whether they are for or against unlimited holidays, will depend on whether they read the *Yes* or *No* text. During the meeting, they should try to use the key words and expressions, as well as the arguments, from the text they read.

Should staff have unlimited holidays?

Set a time limit of ten minutes, with the possibility of extending the time by a further five minutes if necessary. If a group comes to a decision quickly, they should talk about how and when the implementation will be carried out or, alternatively, justify their decision not to implement it.

Teaching and learning strategy: students as observers

We all know that it's not always mathematically possible to divide the students up exactly as per instructed in teaching notes. This 'problem' has its benefits, however, as it provides you with the opportunity of allocating one student to the role of observer.

The observer should make notes of what goes on during the role-play. For example, during the meeting task above, the observer could make notes on the following:

- good language used;
- points where someone did not use the correct vocabulary;
- the tone of the meeting (Was it friendly or did participants start to argue? Was it formal or informal?);
- whether everyone had the chance to voice their opinion or whether any one person was dominant;
- the participants' body language and facial expressions.

During the meeting, the observer should remain silent. After the meeting, the observer should give the participants feedback on their performance (individually, as well as in a group context) and, also, provide their overall opinion on how the meeting went.

This very important feedback will give the participants the time and opportunity to reflect on their performance and skill in carrying out important business tasks in English.

Reflection

Students discuss the meeting and its outcome with the rest of the class. At this point, students could also talk about the key words and expressions they found when they read their half of the article. How many did they (naturally) use in their meeting?

Writing

Working again in their teams from task 4, students plan what they will write to their employees who have been eagerly waiting to hear what decision was reached at the meeting.

After planning what they will write, the students write their emails individually. If time is short, the writing part of this task can be set as homework.

Discussion

Students discuss the questions. Ask them whether they think their opinion has changed during the course of this lesson and whether they feel better informed as a result.

Vocabulary record

Here, students should be encouraged to record all of the new and useful vocabulary they have learnt during the lesson, not only in the form presented in the article but also in related forms.

Related topics on onestopenglish

The following Business Spotlight lesson is about another trend in flexible working, working away from the office:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/out-of-office/551863.article>

This Business Spotlight lesson explores the idea that Americans feel obliged to work too many hours, often without any paid holiday:

<http://www.onestopenglish.com/business/business-spotlight/do-americans-work-too-much/551926.article>

Should staff have unlimited holidays?

1 Warmer

SHEET A

Answer the questions.

1. What is the procedure for booking time off at your workplace?
2. How far in advance do you need to book your annual leave to make sure you get the days or weeks you want?
3. How many days of annual leave are you allocated each year?
4. Is your annual leave paid?
5. Do you have to coordinate your annual leave with your colleagues?
6. Have you ever been refused the holiday dates you wanted to take?
7. Are there any particular times of year when no one in your company is allowed to be on holiday?
8. In your opinion, is planning your annual leave a difficult or easy task?

2 Key words

Read the definitions and find the key words in the article.

1. people who start a company or business _____
2. small new businesses _____
3. take action in order to deal with a difficult situation _____
4. someone who starts a new business or businesses and makes good business deals

5. an idea for something new _____
6. extremely tired and without enough energy to do anything else _____
7. ashamed and sorry because you have done something wrong _____
8. angry disagreement between people or groups _____
9. an angry unhappy feeling that you have when you think you have been treated unfairly

10. an annoyed or impatient feeling that you get when you are prevented from doing what you want

11. the use of something in a bad, dishonest or harmful way _____
12. make someone leave their job, sometimes as a punishment _____

3 Expressions

Put the words in the right order to make expressions from the article. What do they mean and what are they used to talk about?

1. advantage of take _____
2. up the team holding _____
3. above weight their punch _____
4. forward ball the move _____
5. ideal far from _____
6. to so gone far as _____

Should staff have unlimited holidays?

SHEET A

Should staff have unlimited holidays?

Article A

Young businesses, in particular, are tending more often towards flexible holiday rules. Vicki Sussens spoke to two business people about the advantages and disadvantages.



NO!

“Very few good employees will take breaks”

JASON EVANISH

much. If you are an experienced entrepreneur, as I am now, the concept might make sense because you'll know when you should take time off. You also know that being recharged will make you much more productive than carrying on exhausted for months. But having fixed holiday times can really help staff to take time off when they need it without feeling guilty.

Unlimited holidays can also be a dangerous option for your lower-quality employees. What do you do when one of them repeatedly takes time off within a short period or at a time that is far from ideal for your firm? How do you stop that without conflict?

A situation like this can also cause resentment among other employees and frustration for all involved. Those going on holiday see it as their right, while hard workers not taking so much time off see it as abuse. Finally, you can hardly fire people for taking too much of their unlimited holiday.

A solution to these problems is to have an open holiday system whereby staff don't have to apply for holidays but have a fixed number of days they can take. That will stop abuse of the system. And you can get the workaholics to take their unused holiday. Some firms, like Evernote, have gone so far as to pay people to go on holiday to make sure they take the breaks they need.

JASON EVANISH is the founder of Get Lighthouse, an app to help you be a better manager. He previously started Greenhorn Connect, which brings together the start-up community in Boston, Massachusetts.

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- 1 Many founders of start-ups are now experimenting with different holiday policies, including unlimited holidays. While unlimited holidays have some benefits, there are two major problems: the way your best employees handle them and the way your worst employees handle them.
- 2 An unlimited-holiday policy can take advantage of your best employees. I had unlimited holiday time at a former employer and found it really hard to walk away from my work. We didn't have a big team and, on the few days' holiday I took, I was always stressed. I worried I was holding up the team and I knew I'd have a huge amount of work waiting for me when I got back. Employees who punch above their weight are under a lot of pressure to constantly move the ball forward. This means that very few good employees will take holidays so they risk burning out.
- 3 Without fixed holiday times, it is difficult to know when it's OK to take time off and how much is too

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Should staff have unlimited holidays?

1 Warmer

SHEET B

Answer the questions.

1. What is the procedure for booking time off at your workplace?
2. How far in advance do you need to book your annual leave to make sure you get the days or weeks you want?
3. How many days of annual leave are you allocated each year?
4. Is your annual leave paid?
5. Do you have to coordinate your annual leave with your colleagues?
6. Have you ever been refused the holiday dates you wanted to take?
7. Are there any particular times of year when no one in your company is allowed to be on holiday?
8. In your opinion, is planning your annual leave a difficult or easy task?

2 Key words

Read the definitions and find the key words and phrases in the article.

1. having attitudes that are considered modern and reasonable _____
2. a set of plans or actions agreed on by a business or other group _____
3. a complicated and annoying system of rules and processes _____
4. a phrase used for emphasizing that something is true, even though it is opposite to what other people say or believe _____
5. a particular trade or service and the people who work in it _____
6. a normal office job, in which you usually work from nine o'clock until five o'clock

7. words or phrases that are used to describe people or things _____
8. a holiday that two people take after they get married _____
9. the habit of not being at work when you should be, usually without a good reason

10. employees leaving their jobs _____
11. a gradual change or development _____
12. someone who starts a business together, or in partnership, with someone else

3 Expressions

Put the words in the right order to make expressions from the article. What do they mean and what are they used to talk about?

1. of rid get _____
2. with away did _____
3. take of advantage _____
4. together pull _____
5. sickie a pull _____
6. day take off a _____

Should staff have unlimited holidays?

SHEET B

Should staff have unlimited holidays? Article B

Young businesses, in particular, are tending more often towards flexible holiday rules. Vicki Sussens spoke to two business people about the advantages and disadvantages.



YES!

“If you trust staff to behave like adults, they generally will”
JENNY BIGGAM

The media industry is not a nine-to-five industry; the most important thing is to get the job done. We wanted the team to pull together so that we can deliver the best work for our clients and have a better chance against companies that are often bigger than ours.

Obviously, it is important for businesses to be well managed but it is possible to do this without giving people labels and setting limits on how or where they do their work.

Mostly, our team take about four weeks' holiday a year, maybe more if they have something special on, such as a honeymoon. We have very few problems with absenteeism. Why would you pull a sickie when you can take a day off?

My team tell me that these policies improve their motivation. In fact, our firm came third in the 2014 *Sunday Times* survey “Best Small Companies to Work For”. We have also had very few staff losses. But, most of all, being a nice place to work for is good for business. Our profits are up 40 per cent year on year. While, obviously, not all employers can be flexible with holidays, the general trend towards trusting staff more is good for staff and businesses, too.

JENNY BIGGAM is a co-founder and head of the British media firm the7stars, which is based in London.

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- 1 The recent decision of Richard Branson, head of the Virgin Group, to let his central team take as much holiday as they like is enlightened. We've had this policy at the7stars, a media agency, since we started the business in 2005.
- 2 When we began, we wanted to create a company that was nice to work for. Instead of thinking of all the rules we needed to follow, we asked what rules we could get rid of. The bureaucracy around going on holiday was one of the first things to go.
- 3 Our staff can take as much holiday as they want without getting permission or filling out holiday forms. We also did away with job titles and our staff can work the hours they want, where they want.
- 4 Contrary to the main argument against unlimited holidays, since we started, none of our staff has taken advantage of the system. If you trust staff to behave like adults, we discovered they generally will.

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Should staff have unlimited holidays?

4 A meeting

Work in teams of four to six. You are the management team of a young company.

Hold a meeting to discuss whether or not you should introduce unlimited holidays in the company.

- If you read the *No* text, then you will be against the proposal.
- If you read the *Yes* text, then you will be in favour of the proposal.
- Take ten minutes to prepare your arguments – use the language and information from the text you have just read.
- Hold a meeting and come to a decision.

5 Reflection

In your teams, reflect on the success of the meeting. Talk about what you could do to improve your performance next time.

Choose a representative from your group to tell the rest of the class what decision your team reached and why.

6 Writing

Write an email to your employees informing them of the decision you made at the meeting. Give the reasons for your decision and tell your employees how it will affect them.

7 Discussion

- Would it be possible to introduce unlimited holidays in your workplace?
- Would you want to work in a company where they have a system of unlimited holidays? Why? Why not?

