

## Wish you weren't here

**Level:** Intermediate–upper intermediate

**Time:** 90 minutes

**Summary:** This lesson is about annual leave and its mental, physical and economic benefits for both employees and employers. In this lesson, students:

1. discuss their last holiday and any holiday plans they have, as well as their holiday entitlements;
2. study a text about the advantages of taking annual leave;
3. learn about the attitudes of millennials towards annual leave and discuss if, and in what way, their own views differ.

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student

**Group size:** Any

**Note:** This lesson plan is for both pre-experience and in-work business students based on an original article first published in *Business Spotlight* issue 1/2020.

### Warmer

To introduce the topic of taking time off work to go on holiday, students discuss their answers to the questions with a partner.

### Key words

Students match the key words with the definitions and then find them in the article before reading carefully through the article and noticing how they are used in context. The words are given in the order they appear in the article.

To make it more communicative, the task can be divided up among students. Put them into A and B groups, with the As doing questions 1 to 7 and the Bs 8 to 14. Then put them into A–B pairs and get them to share their words and definitions.

### Key:

- |                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. toiling     | 8. bottomless  |
| 2. leave       | 9. entitlement |
| 3. counselling | 10. allowance  |
| 4. perk        | 11. reluctant  |
| 5. retention   | 12. notice     |
| 6. idyllic     | 13. delegate   |
| 7. liabilities | 14. recharge   |

### Understanding the article

Students read the statements and decide, with a partner, whether they are true or false according to the article. Together they decide how to rewrite the statements that are false to make them true.

### Key:

1. T
2. F – *People who take holidays, whether long or short, are more likely to enjoy better mental and physical health.*
3. T
4. F – *Not only do they continue to do this, many more companies are now offering their staff unlimited or bottomless holidays.*
5. T
6. F – *More than 30% of workers in the UK do not take their complete annual leave allowance.*
7. F – *Employees should plan in advance and give their employers plenty of notice of a planned holiday.*

### Taking leave

a.

Students scan the article to find words that are used before the word *leave* (these can all be found in paragraphs 4 to 6) and write them onto the word fork.

b.

Then they add any more they can think of, e.g. *maternity, paternity, parental, unpaid, compassionate.*

c.

When you check their answers, make sure they know what the collocations mean and that they are able to use them to talk about their company or a company they know or used to work at.

**Key:** *annual, paid, sick, unlimited, unused*

## Wish you weren't here

### Work martyrs

a.

Using the words provided, students complete the statistics about millennials (that is, people who became adults around the year 2000) and their attitudes to taking time off work.

**Key:**

1. *no one else*
2. *complete dedication*
3. *want to be seen as*
4. *considered for*
5. *afraid of*
6. *fear*

b.

Students talk about which of the reasons they can most identify with, as well as those they most disagree with. Tell them to give reasons for their answers, providing examples from their work experience, where possible, to back up their opinions.

### Discussion

Students discuss the questions, many of which contain language from the article.

## Wish you weren't here

### 1 Warmer

When did you last go on holiday?

- Where did you go?
- How many days did you take off work for your holiday?
- How did you feel after your holiday when you went back to work?

### 2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Find and underline them in the article, then read the article and note how they are used in context.

counselling    idyllic    leave    liabilities    perk    retention    toiling

1. working very hard, especially when the work is tiring or difficult \_\_\_\_\_
2. a period of time away from your job \_\_\_\_\_
3. advice and help that you give someone for their problems, especially as your job \_\_\_\_\_
4. an extra payment or benefit that you get in your job \_\_\_\_\_
5. the ability to keep workers from leaving a company \_\_\_\_\_
6. extremely wonderful, beautiful and peaceful \_\_\_\_\_
7. what a company owes an employee (usually money or time off) \_\_\_\_\_

allowance    bottomless    delegate    entitlement    notice    recharge    reluctant

8. having no limits or end \_\_\_\_\_
9. the right to receive something \_\_\_\_\_
10. an amount of something that you are officially allowed by a particular set of rules or by the law \_\_\_\_\_
11. not really wanting to do something \_\_\_\_\_
12. information that something is going to happen \_\_\_\_\_
13. give part of your work, duties or responsibilities to someone else \_\_\_\_\_
14. rest after being very busy so that you will be ready to start working again \_\_\_\_\_

## Wish you weren't here

### Wish you weren't here

By Julian Earwaker

**Lots of short breaks can do you as much good as a long holiday. Some companies even offer their employees an unlimited number of free days. So why do many employees not take their full holiday entitlement? It doesn't help that managers often fail to set a good example. JULIAN EARWAKER reports.**

Some businesses have had success with the policy. Since adopting unlimited paid leave, Inventium, an innovation consulting firm in Melbourne, Australia, has seen sick leave halve and retention increase. To many employees, the concept of unlimited leave sounds as idyllic as the Virgin website picture of Sir Richard lying under a palm tree looking out at a blue sea.

**1** The American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–82) was once quoted as saying that people didn't achieve great things all of a sudden. They did so by "toiling" while others "slept". This kind of thinking is what puts people off taking leave from work. But everyone needs a break – even Longfellow.

Such policies have some hidden benefits for the company as well as its staff. Pilita Clark, business columnist at the *Financial Times*, says that employers use unlimited leave as a way of saving millions in unused leave liabilities when employees move on to new jobs. Companies "can safely offer bottomless holidays knowing most employees will never take them, especially in the US," she adds.

**2** Research by healthcare firm BUPA shows that workers who take holidays, whether long or short, enjoy better mental and physical health than those who do not. The Framingham Heart Study, for example, found that women who don't take holidays are 50 per cent more likely to have a heart attack than those who take a break. For men, it's 30 per cent. Holidays help people "interrupt the cycle of stress", says Elizabeth Scott, a wellness coach at VeryWellMind.com. They can also "lead to sharper thinking and increased creativity."

Across the globe, millions of workers are failing to take their full holiday entitlement. The Brits wasted 163 million annual leave days in 2016. More than 30 per cent of UK workers are guilty of not using their full holiday entitlement. Figures from Glassdoor.co.uk show that in the UK, only 35 per cent of 18- to 24-year-olds are using all their annual leave allowance. In the US, workers take only an average of 16.7 days' holiday each year.

**3** Research also shows that taking a break can improve productivity and performance upon return to work. RealBusiness.co.uk reports that after taking holidays, two-thirds of people feel greater job satisfaction and more productive at work. Meg Selig, a counselling expert writing in *Psychology Today*, says that breaks "increase productivity and creativity ... [and] restore motivation, especially for long-term goals."

What's the best way to get reluctant holidaymakers to take much-needed holidays? The attitude of senior staff and management is key. Not only should managers encourage staff to take leave but they should also ensure that time-critical tasks are given to someone else and remind their teams that annual leave is not an optional extra.

**4** "To take advantage of the benefits of breaks, some companies have offered their staff unlimited annual leave – allowing their staff to take as much holiday as they like. This is not a new idea. When Sir Richard Branson introduced this perk for staff at Virgin five years ago, it was part of a movement towards flexible working introduced by IBM in the 1990s and has been followed by Netflix, Glassdoor, LinkedIn and others.

Some workers think it is too much trouble to organize their leave. To make it easier, Totaljobs.com says that employees should give their employers plenty of notice of a planned holiday, book travel and hotels in advance, delegate important work to colleagues and, most importantly, leave their work smartphone and other technology at home. "Time off," says BUPA, "should mean time off."

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So what if you're a workaholic businessperson who would rather not take a holiday? Telegraph.co.uk says it's time to let go of your ego and recharge by spending time with family and friends. You should think of leave as an investment – and don't cheat!

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There's another picture of a smiling Sir Richard, sitting on a terrace with a deep blue sky beyond. So what happens if you have a holiday and can't stand the thought of getting back to work? "You probably do not need another holiday," says travel expert Brian de Haaff on HuffPost.com. "You need a new job."

## Wish you weren't here

### 3 Understanding the article

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Many people are put off taking leave because they believe that only busy, hardworking people are successful.
2. People who take long holidays are more likely to be lazy and unfit.
3. People are more likely to be motivated to work on their long-term goals when they return to work after a holiday.
4. Large companies such as Netflix and Virgin have stopped offering their staff unlimited leave.
5. Employees are more likely to stay at a company that offers unlimited annual leave.
6. Less than 16.7% of workers in the UK do not take their complete annual leave allowance.
7. Employees should book last-minute holidays to make it easier to go on annual leave.

### 4 Taking leave

a. Find five different collocations containing the word *leave* in the article. Write them onto the word fork. What do they mean?

	leave

- b. Add any further types of leave that you can think of.
- c. Which of these types of leave does your company offer its employees?

## Wish you weren't here

### 5 Work martyrs

**martyr** – someone who suffers a lot (usually because of a belief they hold)

a. Complete the statistics with these words and phrases.

considered for      complete dedication      fear      want to be seen as  
afraid of      no one else

### WORK MARTYRS

American millennials have been called 'work martyrs' because they don't often take leave, making everybody else feel as if they shouldn't either. They say the following reasons prevent them from taking time off.

- 34% think \_\_\_\_\_ (1) can do the job.
- 30% want to show \_\_\_\_\_ (2).
- 27% don't \_\_\_\_\_ (3) replaceable.
- 26% want to be \_\_\_\_\_ (4) a rise or promotion.
- 23% are \_\_\_\_\_ (5) what the boss might think.
- 20% \_\_\_\_\_ (6) that they will lose their job.

Source: [www.statista.com/chart/5598/employees-attitudes-towards-taking-holidays](http://www.statista.com/chart/5598/employees-attitudes-towards-taking-holidays)

b. Discuss the bullet points above. Do you share these beliefs? Why? Why not?

## Wish you weren't here

### 6 Discussion

- What is your annual leave allowance? How many days' paid leave can you take a year?
- Are you allowed to carry your holiday forward and add it to your following year's holiday entitlement?
- Does your company allow employees to take all their annual leave in one go? For example, could you take a five-week holiday this summer?
- Do you have to take your colleagues' holiday plans into consideration when you plan your holiday?
- Who has to approve your annual leave?
- How much of your holiday entitlement do you still have left this year?
- Have you already planned your next holiday? How many days will you need to take off work?
- Do you think your company should offer its employees bottomless holidays?