

# Out of Office Culture Report

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May 2024 • The Harris Poll Thought Leadership Practice





# Methodology

This report is based on a custom survey that was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll between April 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup>, among 1,170 employed adults aged 18 and over.

This research comprises of 166 Gen Z (ages 18-27), 486 Millennials (ages 28-43), 365 Gen X (ages 44-59), and 153 Boomers (ages 60 and older). This research is also broken down by title of role at the company, comprising of 177 C-suite employees, 210 upper management employees, 272 middle management employees, and 511 employees in other roles. The survey also includes 259 remote employees (who work 100% from home), 324 hybrid employees (work a mixture of in the office and at home), and 587 in-person employees (work 100% from the office).





# Executive Summary

## ***Policy isn't the issue: workplace culture and workload pressures dictate America's paid time off usage***

- The majority of Americans (83%) are satisfied with their company's paid time off / vacation policy; 60% are given more than 10 paid days off per year, an additional 7% have an "unlimited vacation policy."
  - A third of American workers indicate "unlimited vacation policy" means more than 30 days off.
- However, most (78%) do not use the maximum amount of paid time off allowed by their employer. In fact, the average American worker took 15 paid days off last year, despite half (49%) being allowed more than that by their employer.
- The top barriers preventing workers from taking more time off are "pressure to always be available and responsive to demands" (31%) and "heavy workload" (30%).
- Employers aren't helping the narrative, as 76% of workers say, "I wish my workplace culture placed a stronger emphasis on the value of taking regular breaks and utilizing paid time off."
  - The anxiety-ridden culture around the request is prevalent, as half (49%) get nervous when requesting time off from their employer.

## ***There's no rest for the wicked! (even if they are "out of office")***

- Although 62% of the American workforce say, "being 'out of office' means absolutely no working," nearly the same amount (60%) admit that they struggle to "fully disconnect" when they can take their time off.
- Most American workers (86%) say they would check emails from their boss while on paid time off/vacation, and more than half (56%) have taken work-related calls during their time off.
- Guilt and anticipatory angst rule their vacation days: Two-thirds (66%) of American workers dread the backlog of work awaiting their return, with nearly half (47%) feeling guilty when taking their time off.

## ***Longing for a break, the workforce aspires to use the paid time off they do take for a relaxing escape***

- Last year, American workers took paid time off for vacation (47%), followed by health and wellness (19%).
- Three in four (79%) prioritize using their paid time off / vacation days to relax and recharge rather than for other activities.
- In their ideal paid time off day, Americans would prioritize rest and relaxation (65%) and quality time with loved ones (50%). Their ideal location to spend the day would be on the beach (37%), followed by a city within the US (19%) and their couch / bed (17%).
  - "Don't Worry, Be Happy" is the anthem of their ideal paid time off day (29%), followed by "The Lazy Song" (19%).

# The state of paid time off in America

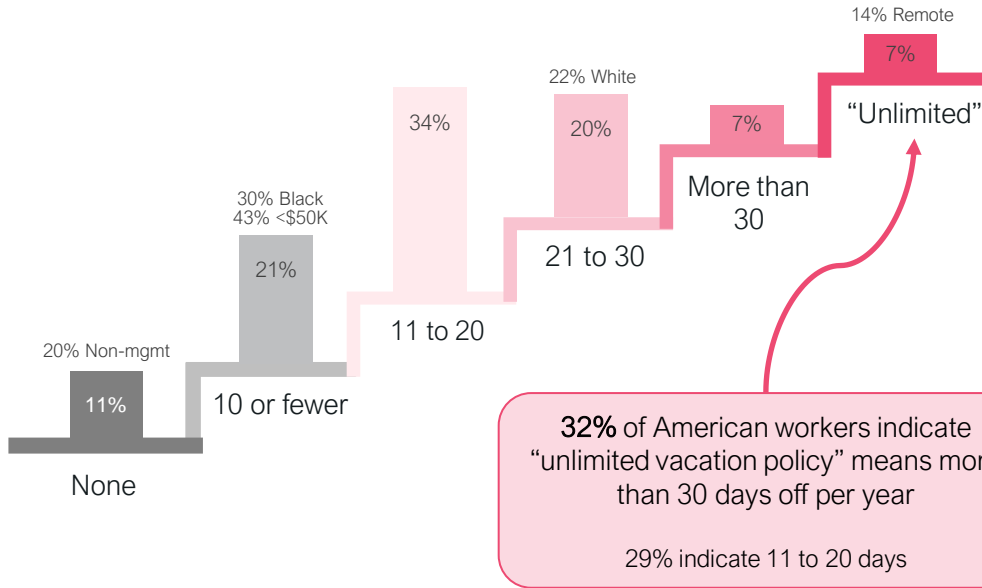
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Corporate policy vs. corporate culture



# Most employed Americans are satisfied with their company's paid time off policy, with over half allowed between 11 and 30 days per year

Amount of paid time off allowed by company (work days/year)



**83%**  
American Workers

Are satisfied with their company's paid time off / vacation policy.

91% 21+ paid days off  
 88% Hybrid  
 85% Men | 79% Women  
 87% \$100K+



Three in four, especially younger workers, do not use the maximum amount of paid time off — in fact, it's an aspiration for the majority

**78%**

American Workers

**Do not use the maximum amount** of paid time off / vacation days allowed by their employer.

89% Gen Z  
85% Upper management  
83% Millennials

**75%**

American Workers

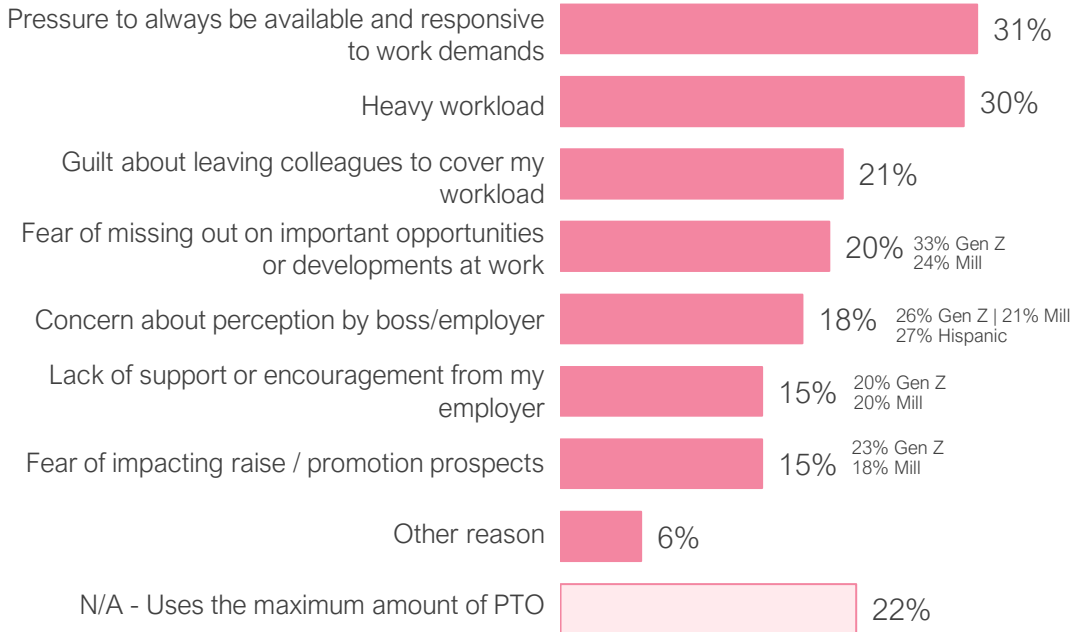
“I wish I were able to take **all of my available days** off.”

83% Upper management  
82% Urban  
80% Millennials



# Pressure to be available and heavy workload are top barriers from taking more time, Gen Z and Millennials fear employer reaction and career implications

Barriers to taking more paid time off / vacation days  
% selected among those who receive paid time off



**63%**  
American Workers

**“The pressure to meet deadlines and maintain productivity often deters me from taking extended time away from work.”**

73% Upper management  
71% Millennials

**49%**  
American Workers

**“I get nervous when requesting paid time off / vacation days from my employer.”**

61% Millennials  
58% Gen Z



# Millennials' fear of taking time off has made them culprits of out of office workarounds, including mouse moves and playing hooky

Out of office workarounds  
% Millennials have done



**38%**

Millennial Workers

Have **“moved their mouse” to maintain online status** on company’s messaging system. (e.g., Microsoft Teams, Slack, etc.)

**31% Total**  
30% Gen Z  
29% Gen X  
20% Boomers



**37%**

Millennial Workers

Have **taken time off without communicating** it to their manager / employer. (i.e., be out of office without officially being "out of office")

**28% Total**  
24% Gen Z  
24% Gen X  
18% Boomers



**37%**

Millennial Workers

Have **scheduled a message to send outside of regular hours.** to give the impression they’re working extra hours

**30% Total**  
27% Gen Z  
24% Gen X  
26% Boomers





# As workplace pressures heighten, workers crave vacation—but for half, it’s a luxury they can’t afford

**81%**

American Workers

“As work becomes more stressful, **my urge to take a vacation becomes stronger.**”

86% Northeast  
77% Men | 85% Women

**50%**

American Workers

“Taking time off from work is **a luxury I cannot afford.**”

63% <\$50K  
62% No paid time off  
59% Millennials  
57% Black  
57% HS education or less  
57% Urban



# Beating the imbalance: The American workforce is calling to their employers to focus on the culture around taking paid time off, not the policy

**76%**

American Workers

“I wish my workplace culture placed a **stronger emphasis on the value of taking regular breaks** and utilizing paid time off.”

85% 10 days or fewer paid time off  
73% Men | 80% Women

**65%**

American Workers

“I find **striking a balance** between work commitments and personal time off to be challenging.”

74% Upper management  
74% Millennials  
72% Hybrid  
71% Urban  
62% Men | 70% Women

# Out of sight, not out of mind

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The realities of taking time off in the American workplace



# In a culture that glorifies being busy, Americans are consistently connected – even outside of work hours

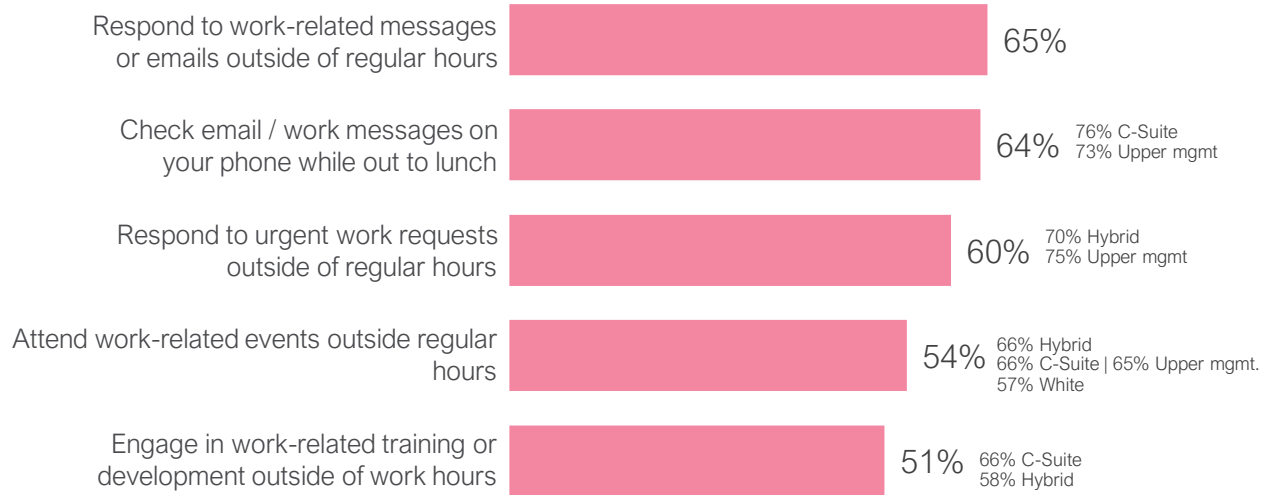
# 85%

American Workers

“America has a culture that glorifies being busy.”

89% Millennials  
89% Northeast  
83% Men | 88% Women

Work-related activities while outside of work  
% have done





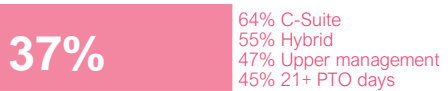
When it comes to being “out of office,” many say that means absolutely no working, yet most struggle to disconnect and end up logging in on vacation



Work-related activities while on vacation  
% have done



have taken work-related calls or meetings during their time off



have worked from a third location while on vacation (i.e., coffee shop, hotel)



# Almost nine in 10 employed Americans say they would check an email from their boss, even when on PTO or vacation

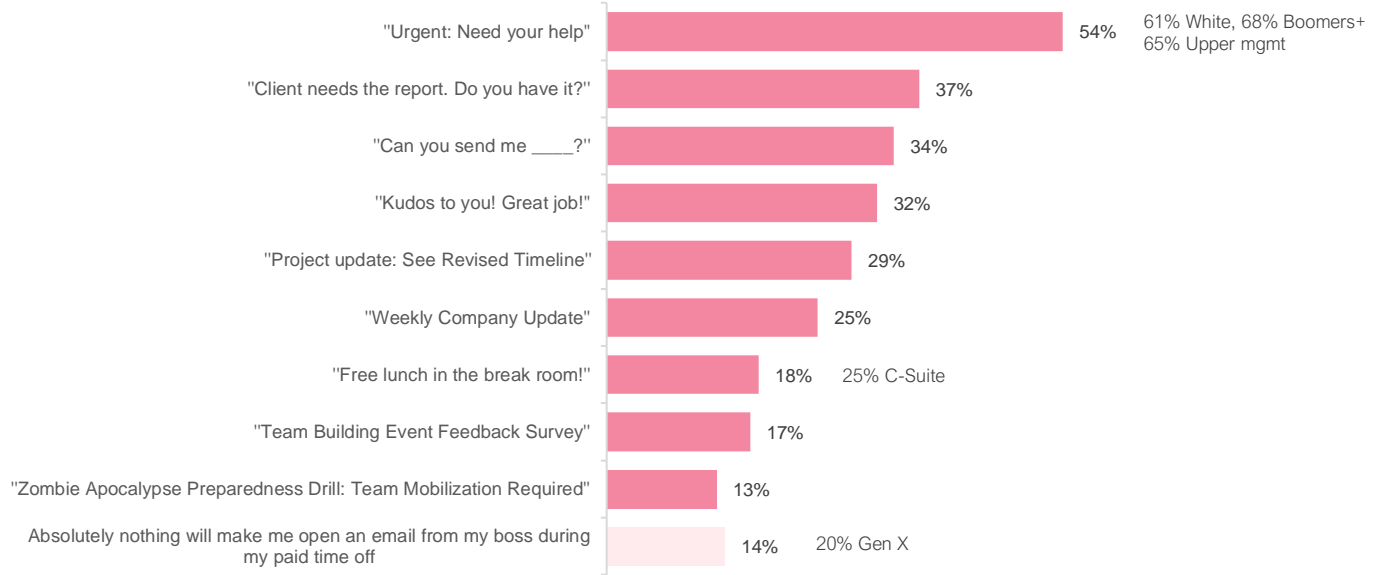
86%

American Workers

Would check an email from their boss while on paid time off / vacation.

95% Gen Z  
95% Upper management

Subject lines that would entice workers to open their email during their paid time off (email sent by boss)





Even if they're not physically connected, anticipatory angst of the work to come and guilt weight on the minds of many

**66%**

American Workers

**"I dread the backlog of work awaiting my return from my time off."**

78% Upper management  
74% Middle management  
72% Urban

**47%**

American Workers

**"I feel guilty when I take paid time off / vacation days."**

59% Upper management  
56% Gen Z  
55% Hispanic  
53% Millennials

# Aspiring to relax

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The American workforces' ideal day off





Last year, the average employed Americans took 15 paid days off, top use cases are vacation, followed by health and wellness

The average employed American took **15 paid time off / vacation days** last year.

(there are ~260 working days / year)



How they spent their time off



Vacations

47%



Health and wellness

(e.g., sick days, doctor appointments, etc.)

19%



Parental responsibilities

12%



Family commitments

(e.g., weddings, birthdays, etc.)

11%



Emergency situations

10%



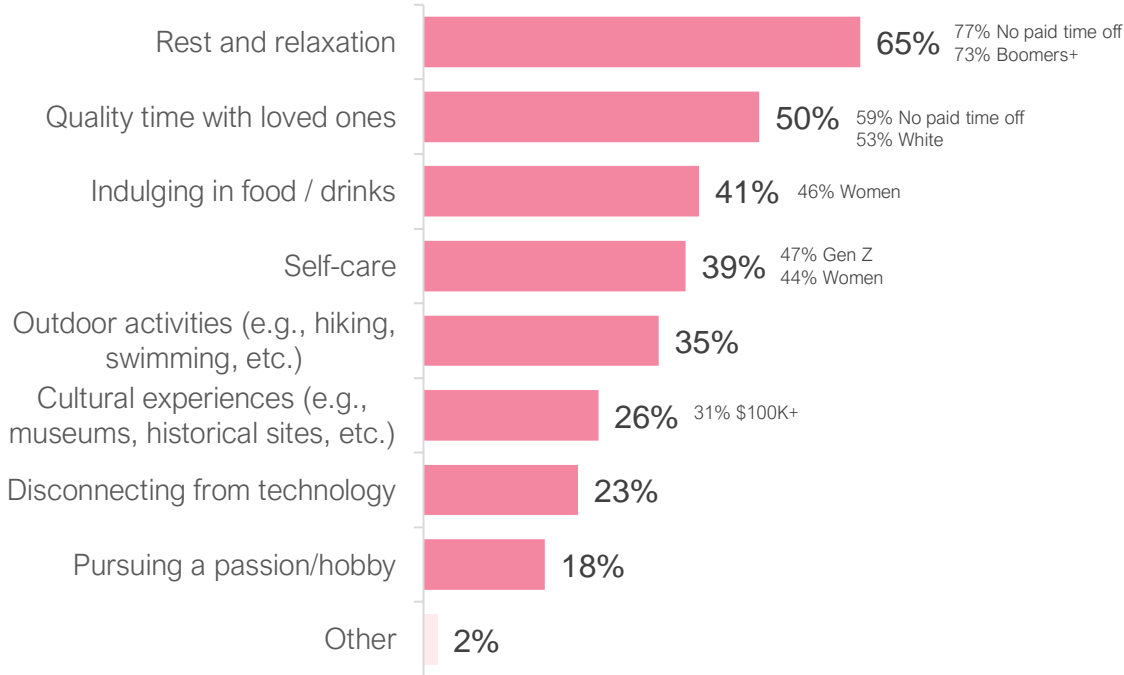
Other

5%



# The classic “R&R” is truly what employed Americans want the most when taking time off, followed by quality time with loved ones

What the workforce ideally prioritizes during a paid day off



**79%**

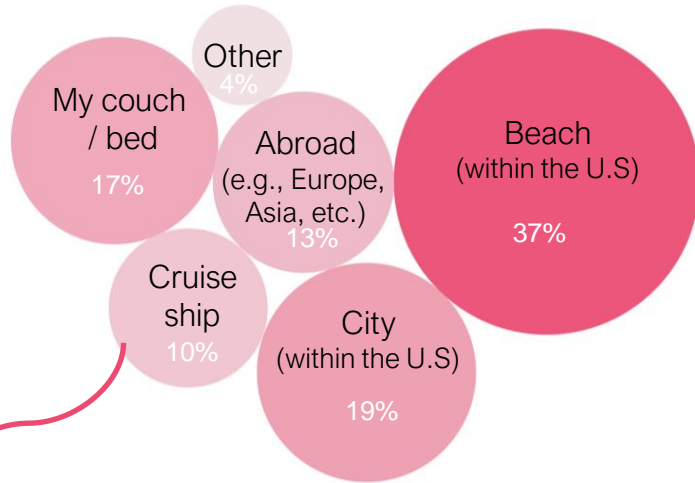
American Workers

**“I prioritize using my paid time off / vacation days to relax and recharge rather than for other activities.”**



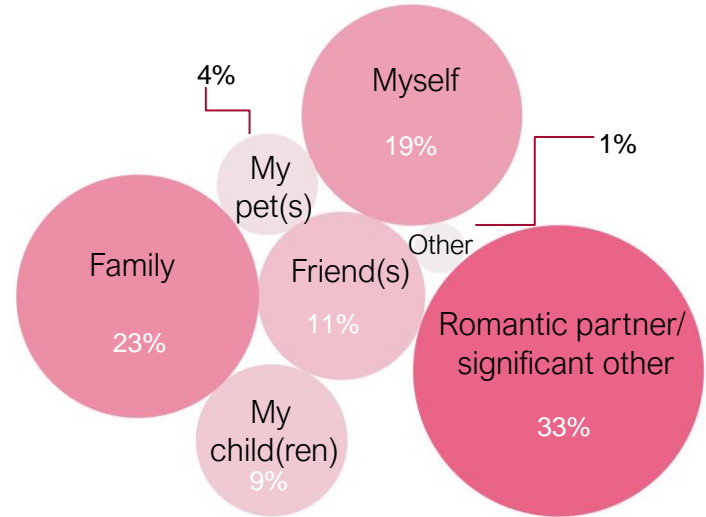
For many, an ideal day off would be spent on the beach or exploring a city and they'd spend it with their significant other or families

Where the workforce ideally spends a paid day off



**72% of employed Americans agree,** "Given that everything is already planned (e.g., accommodation, food, etc.), the thought of going on a cruise sounds more enticing than ever."

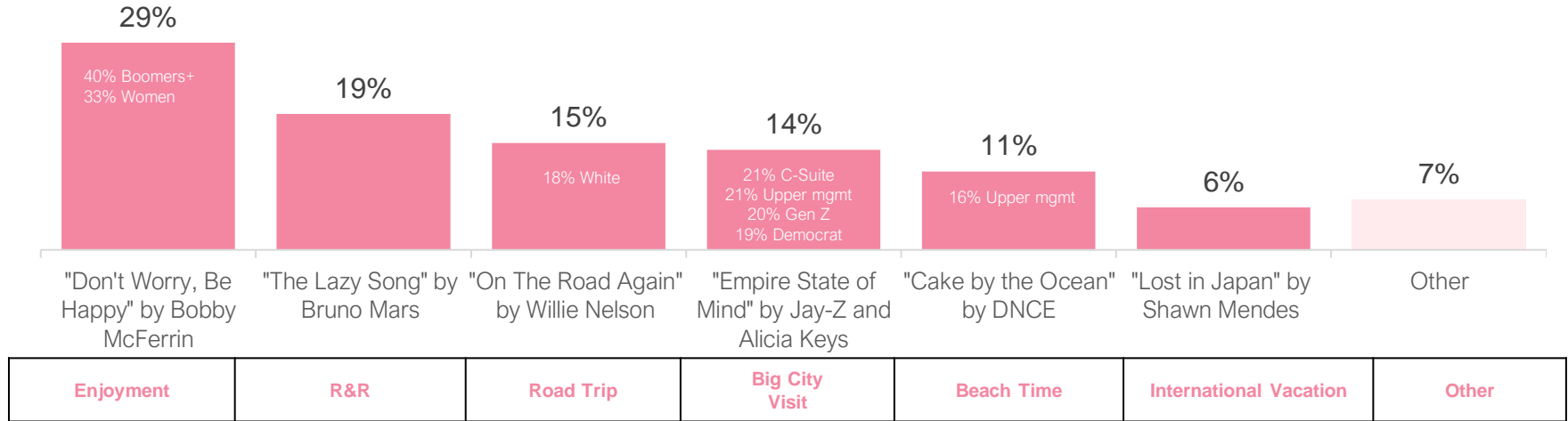
Who the workforce ideally spends a paid day off with





# “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” is the favorite anthem to an ideal vacation day, with Bruno Mars’ hit “The Lazy Song” in a solid second place

The anthem of the workforces’ ideal paid day off



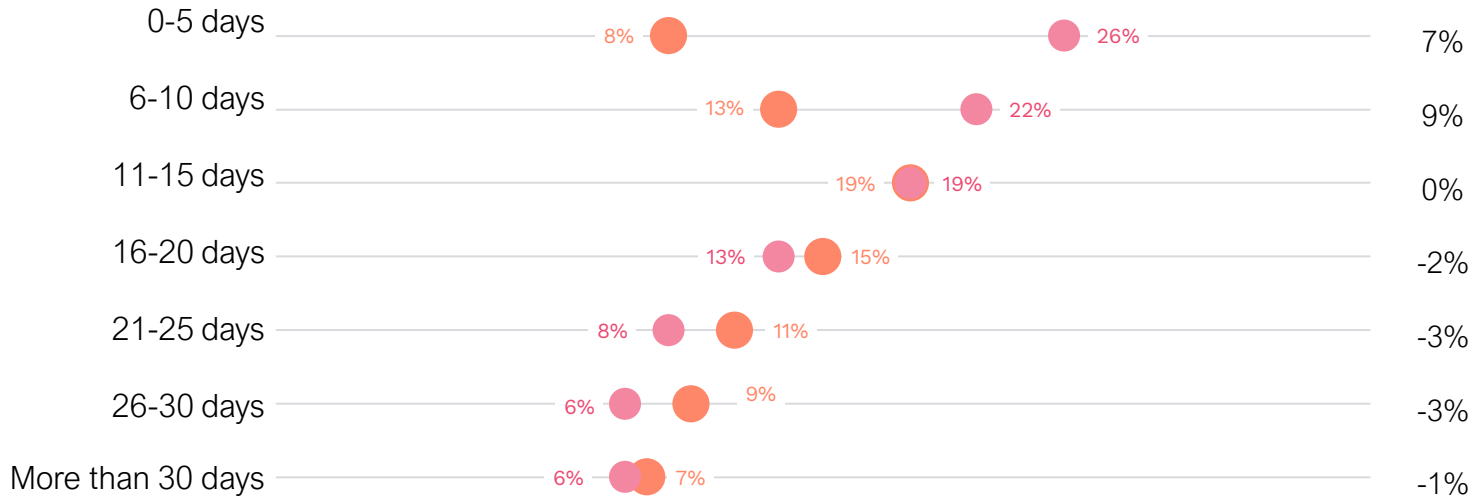
# Appendix



# A gap in the system: the American workforce isn't taking their time off

Amount of paid time off given vs. amount of paid time off taken

● Time allowed by employer      ● Time taken last year



VAC01 How many paid time off days does your company allow you to take per year? (employed; n=1,170)

VAC02 How many paid time off / vacation days did you take last year? (company offers time off; n=1,026)



The youngest generation and the lowest earners took the least amount of days off last year, signaling slimmer margins for certain groups of employed Americans

Number of paid days off taken last year  
Average (including zero)

### AGE

Gen Z	11.4
Millennials	14.6
Gen X	16.4
Boomers+	16.2

### GENDER

Men	15
Women	14.7

### HOUSEHOLD INCOME

< \$50K	10.2
\$50K - \$99K	12.4
\$100K+	17.2

### RACE

White	16.1
People of color	13.3

### EDUCATION LEVEL

HS or less	11.2
Some college	13.1
College graduate	17.5

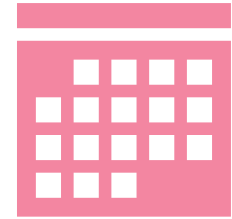
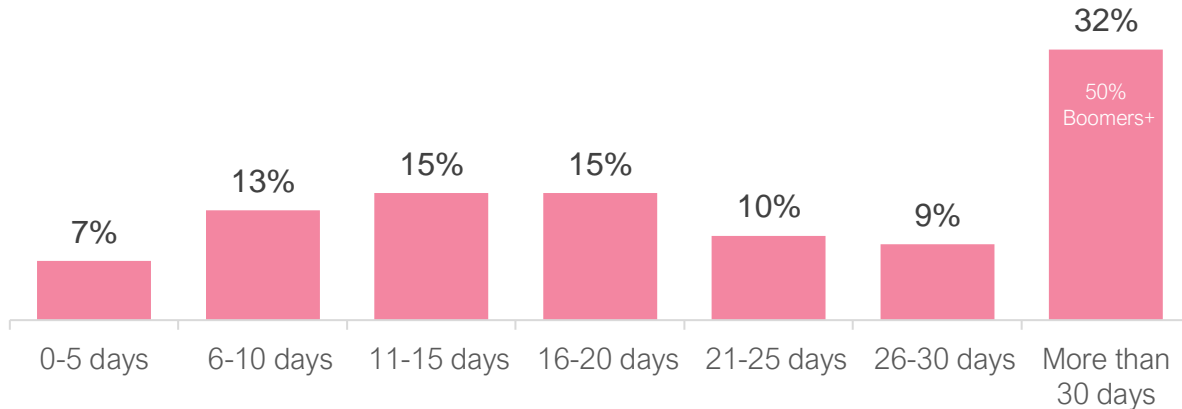
### JOB TITLE

C-Suite	16.9
Upper mgmt	15.1
Middle mgmt	14.6
Other	13.8



# Over half of employed Americans say “Unlimited PTO” policies mean more than 20 days, but those who have it take less than that

Perceptions of “Unlimited Paid Time Off / Vacation Policy”  
# days off an unlimited vacation policy entails



The average employed American with an “unlimited paid time off” took **18 days off** last year  
15 days among all employed

VAC11 Regardless of your current paid time off / vacation policy. How many days off per year does “Unlimited Paid Time Off / Vacation Policy” mean to you? Please select one. (employed; n=1,170) VAC02 How many paid time off / vacation days did you take last year? Please include only working days (Monday - Friday) in your assessment. If you are unsure, please estimate to the best of your knowledge. (company offers time off; n=1,026)





# More paid time off leads to more productive employees

**66%**

American Workers

“If my workplace provided more paid days off, I would be a more productive employee.”

77% Urban  
75% Millennials  
74% Democrats



Amount of paid time off is a top factor when considering a new job, almost half would sacrifice a higher salary for more days.

# 48%

American Workers

“I’d rather have more paid days off than a higher salary.”

57% Upper management  
56% C-Suite  
56% Millennials  
53% South, Urban

Most important factors when considering a new job  
% ranked 1-3

1. Salary	80%
2. Healthcare benefits	56%
3. Paid time off / vacation policy	49%
4. Work environment policy (e.g., remote, hybrid, in-office, etc.)	41%
5. Corporate culture (e.g., work-life balance, co-workers, etc.)	33%
6. Childcare opportunities	20%*
7. Educational stipends (i.e., paying for higher education, certifications, etc.)	17%
8. Other	8%

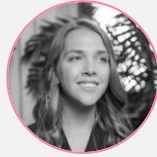
\*among parents

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