



## ***GHN On My Mind: Roger Dow***



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### **It's August: Have You Taken Your Vacation Yet?**

*If you have yet to take or plan vacation this year, you're not alone. The latest report from Project: Time Off, a U.S. Travel initiative, revealed that 55% of American workers left vacation time on the table in 2015.*

I recently returned from a week-long vacation, and I'm feeling refreshed and ready for the rest of the year. Unfortunately, many of my fellow workers cannot say the same: 55% of Americans left earned vacation time unused in 2015.

Project: Time Off, an initiative of the U.S. Travel Association, is working to get Americans out of the office and on vacation.

For decades, the U.S. was a well-vacationed nation, where workers used an average of 20.3 vacation days annually. However, thanks to factors like the rise of the [constantly-connected workplace](#), Americans reported taking off just 16.2 days in 2015. That's almost a full week less than the pre-2000 average.

The decline in vacation use should be of particular concern for the travel and hospitality industry, as domestic leisure travel accounts for [\\$555.9 billion](#) in direct travel spending.

<https://media.giphy.com/media/3oEjHFm4N5TeVAkJs4/giphy.gif>



Project: Time Off's latest report, "[The State of American Vacation 2016](#)," provides the most comprehensive look at America's vacation habits to date. As a country, we left a record-breaking 658 million vacation days unused last year. That's the equivalent of 1.8 million years, [the same age as Homo erectus](#)—enough time to send us back before humans existed.

Worse, 222 million of those days were forfeited—as in, these days could not be rolled over, paid out or banked for any other benefit. That is an average of two full days forfeited per worker—days when employees essentially worked for free.

The economic impact of this missed time off is enormous. Had working Americans used all the vacation time they earned in 2015, it would have meant \$223 billion in spending for the U.S. economy. Using those days would have created 1.6 million jobs, resulting in \$65 billion in additional income.

For the travel industry, unused time off represents a \$122 billion lost opportunity. That's more room nights, more visitors to destinations near and far, and millions of new memories made.

### **What's Stopping Us?**

The obvious question is what's stopping us. Fear of being perceived as replaceable; dread about returning to a mountain of work; and belief that “no one else can do the job” were the top reasons keeping employees from taking their time off. However, compared to 2014, workers in 2015 had relaxed slightly about the main worries keeping them from using all of their leave.



REASONS TIME IS LEFT ON THE TABLE		
	2014 Overwhelmed American	State of American Vacation 2016
Return to a mountain of work	40%	37%
No one else can do the job	35%	30%
I cannot financially afford a vacation	33%	30%
Taking time off harder as you grow in the company	33%	28%
Want to show complete dedication	28%	22%
Don't want to be seen as replaceable	22%	19%

[Constant connectivity](#) has intensified Americans' attachment to work and reduced their ability to break free of the office. While the numbers are moving in the right direction, we still have a long way to go before proclaiming the beginning of a cultural shift in the workplace.

Real workplace change depends on America's managers: 80 percent of employees said that they would be more likely to take time off if they felt fully supported and encouraged to do so by their boss. Unfortunately, nearly six in ten employees aren't feeling supported when it comes to taking time off—and more than half report a lack of support from their colleagues, as well.

This may stem from an overwhelming silence from employers on expectations surrounding vacation and time off: nearly two-thirds (65%) of employees report that they hear nothing, mixed messages or are discouraged from taking time off. One in four (25%) is unsure, or believes that their company expects them to [work on vacation](#).

### What Can Be Done?

Knowing that Americans value vacation (95% believe time off is very important) and have the time to take, it is vital to bridge the gap between understanding and action.



The No. 1 way to inspire Americans to take their time off is encourage them to **plan their vacation time**.

While less than half (49%) of households set aside time to plan their vacation for the year, planners have a distinct advantage over non-planners. They use more of their time: 51 percent of those who plan took all of their vacation time, where just 39 percent of non-planners did. Even better, they are positioned for a longer break, with planners much more likely to take a full week of vacation time or more at a time (69% planners, compared to 46% non-planners). Planning is also associated with increased happiness at home, at work, and with general well-being.

## PLANNING TIME OFF ASSOCIATED WITH INCREASED HAPPINESS

	Plan Time Off: Yes	Plan Time Off: No
Your relationship with your significant other	85%	72%
Personal financial situation	81%	71%
Your relationship with your children	69%	60%
Professional success	90%	82%
Your job	88%	83%
Physical health and well-being	90%	85%
Overall mood and outlook	94%	89%
The company at which you work	87%	84%
Personal relationships with family and friends	97%	94%

Thinking back on my hotel career, I vividly remember seeing young kids jumping into the pool and newlywed couples enjoying the first days of their new life together. I remember families coming together or old friends embracing at reunions. Some of the most rewarding moments of my career resulted from my playing even a small part in creating these memories.

Leisure travel is essential to our industry. Winning back America's Lost Week should be a priority for all of us. Our continued growth depends on it.



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