

Vacation Anyone?

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August 29, 2020

I tried earlier this summer to take vacation. I started with two weeks. Before the first day of the scheduled time off, I had already made a few exceptions to the plan and agreed to join several work calls for some time-sensitive projects. Without other plans in place, I checked my emails every morning as usual. With the open day in front of me, I replied to one email after another. And then there was the manuscript that had been languishing that I figured I would finally get off my desk since I had so much free time. By the end of the two weeks, I had actually safeguarded only two afternoons. In good academic fashion, I gave myself an F-minus on my vacation project.



[Photo Credit](#)

I am planning a do-over both because I know vacation is good for my mental health, and I hate having an F-minus on my transcript. Here are some data about vacation, especially in the time of coronavirus.

1. Vacation is associated with Overall Health. The Multiple Risk Factor Intervention Trial ([MRFIT](#)) that included 12,866 men found that taking vacation was associated with reduced risk of all-cause mortality and specifically mortality due to coronary heart disease. Similarly, the classic [Framingham Heart Study](#) reported an association for women between infrequent vacationing and increased incidence of heart disease or death due to coronary causes during a 20-year follow-up period. Many others studies report [similar findings](#).

2. Vacation is associated with Good Mental Health. Studies abound extolling the [mental health benefits of vacation](#), including reducing stress and preventing burnout. Vacation is associated with enhancing productivity and promoting creativity. Two caveats: 1) the mental health [benefits of vacation do not last forever](#), so vacation is not a one-and-done activity, but rather a practice and 2) the mental health benefits of vacation are limited in the context of work environments that are excessively stressful or problematic. In such cases, perhaps one of the greatest benefits of vacation is gaining perspective and possibly developing a strategy for a change in employment.

3. America: the “No-Vacation Nation?” According to a report from the OECD, a group of 36 of the world’s

wealthiest nations, the United States is the only country that does not require employers to give workers annual paid vacation or paid holidays. Zero days required. [According to the Center for Economic and Policy Research](#), that leaves 23 percent of Americans with no paid vacation and 22 percent without paid holidays. In reality, 90 percent of full-time workers in the United States do get paid vacation time, but a full 55 percent do not take all of their vacation time, and 70 percent report working during vacation.

4. The Unlimited Vacation Policy Experiment. One of the hot trends in vacation policy has been to make it “unlimited.” Companies like Netflix and LinkedIn are among the pioneers in this experiment. The idea is that access to unlimited vacation will improve workplace culture and boost employee morale. The irony is that unlimited paid time off, or PTO as it is often called, is much better for employers than for employees. It is something of a publicity stunt that attracts talent. In reality, [unlimited PTO is associated with employees taking less rather than more time](#), which is not good for employee mental health but good for the corporate bottom line.

5. Vacation in the Time of Coronavirus. Current public health data clearly indicate that vacations are especially important at this time. A recent [KFF study](#) reported that 53% of US adults are experiencing elevated worry and stress, up from 32% in March. Common problems include difficulties with sleep(36%) or eating (32%) patterns, increases in alcohol consumption or substance use (12%), and worsening chronic conditions (12%), due to worry and stress over the coronavirus. With restrictions on travel and quarantine requirements associated with going to and from virus hot spots, vacation in the time of coronavirus requires a rethink, but the health benefits are worth the effort whether you decide to [travel safely](#) or give a [staycation](#) a try.

So with this Five on Friday in mind, I am going to be on vacation the next two Fridays and will, for the first time in over four and a half years, actually take a break from sending this weekly post. It is part of my effort to do better than an F-minus on my do-over vacation in the time of coronavirus. I look forward to being back in touch on Friday, September 18th!