Twitter Thread by Joel Gascoigne



Joel Gascoigne
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Great question @trappology:

■■■ Do I recommend unlimited vacation days?

Here's my take. Thread ■ ■■

> Hey @joelgascoigne do you recommend unlimited vacation days \U0001f44d or \U0001f44e for startups?
>
> — Will Trapp (@trappology) December 19, 2020

I do not recommend unlimited vacation. There are problems with it. The most clear, for us, was that with unlimited vacation, the team did not take enough vacation.

When you have an Unlimited Vacation policy, you introduce a significant amount of decision fatigue with taking vacation. When you don't clearly state the amount of vacation, you put that burden on individuals.

With Unlimited Vacation, a strange side effect is that people start to really think about how taking vacation could reflect on them negatively. When you have to choose every time, and how much, vacation to take, you might just end up taking nothing.

So, I do not recommend Unlimited Vacation.

With that said, I believe Unlimited Vacation gets more criticism than it deserves. Some even go as far as to say that Unlimited Vacation is unethical and a way to stop employees taking vacation.

The thing is, in almost all cases, I really believe Unlimited Vacation comes from a good place. Many people had the same idea at the same time, and it was people with a good heart and the right mindset.

The promise and the origin of Unlimited Vacation, in my mind, is the following:

We're all adults, and when we're part of something we really believe in, we should be trusted to manage our energy and our time.

To do our best work, we need to balance work and rest. Sometimes, the most effective thing to do is to take a break. You can come back energized and having solved problems you couldn't solve by working through them.

We should trust our team to know which choice is right. Will you be most effective in the next quarter if you take some time off, recharge, avoid burnout and allow for space for creative thinking? Or, are you energized and enjoying the work, and the best thing is to keep going?

Often, as employers, we don't truly know where people are in life. People come into a new role in totally different places. Some might be burned out already, some may have had a sabbatical and be raring to go. Some might have gone through a tough personal situation.

I believe many approaches to business today place far too much control with the employer, and not enough with employees.

If you create an environment where team members self-directed, motivated, and bought into the mission, then you can benefit by giving them far more freedom.

Unlimited Vacation was founded on the idea that we should take as much vacation as we feel will give us the best results and make us most energized and effective in our jobs (which we are excited about). If you're at a company you believe in and care about, this makes sense.

When we realized that Unlimited Vacation wasn't working, when we observed that people weren't taking enough time off and we acknowledged the psychological burden it put on teammates, we had a very important decision to make:

Rather than Unlimited Vacation:

- Do we scrap it and go back to the status quo? That means quotas for time off.
- Or, do we push on and find a better solution? One that captures the very positive intentions of Unlimited Vacation, and avoids the downsides.

At Buffer, I strongly pushed for us to get creative and think of new ideas instead of Unlimited Vacation.

The result was Minimum Vacation. It seems almost obvious now, but at the time, we could have easily reverted to the status quo. I'm so glad we didn't.

So. I don't believe in Unlimited Vacation. But, I also believe vacation policies are broken in most workplaces.

I think the best option we have right now, is Minimum Vacation.

Here's Buffer's Minimum Vacation approach:

Our vacation minimum is at least 3 weeks (15 work days) of time off throughout the year, in addition to the public and religious holidays you observe.

Minimum Vacation has worked much better for us than both Unlimited Vacation and Traditional Vacation Policies, and I can't recommend it enough.

And with all of that, I'd like to say:

Try those wild ideas. Question the status quo and try improved approaches.

Test whether those new ideas work, and adapt when they don't.

But fight for a new idea, that still improves the status quo. The world needs that innovation.

Further reading from the Buffer blog on our experimentation with Unlimited Vacation and journey to Minimum Vacation:

- https://t.co/o1fDircRVf
- https://t.co/pbvY6UZ95w
- https://t.co/DXA86logPk