

Ride out the summer slide

Along with warmer temps, summer ushers in a vibe to relax and live a little differently.

This aura can extend into the workplace, where team members out on vacation and present workers thinking about their weekend barbecues interfere with business as usual.

Managers walk a fine line during this period. They recognize the season promotes the rejuvenation everyone needs, but the company also must keep operations flowing in an orderly fashion. Fortunately, various ways exist to approach the matter.

An ounce of prevention

Proactive measures from the onset often keep problems from ever arising. Friendly, but informative, reminders clearly state expectations and provide a common reference if issues develop down the line.

For instance, vacation policies protect employers from ending up short-staffed when too many workers take off at the same time. Monitoring also prevents placing a heavy burden on remaining employees. An email about how planning benefits everyone—as well as specifics on when to apply and how requests are granted (first come, seniority, at least two weeks of notice, etc.)—shows that you care about people enjoying their deserved days, but in a manner that doesn't impede productivity.

A similar strategy aids in the common office dilemma of summer dress. Better to tackle the issue from the get-go than confront a room full of workers whose attire looks more appropriate for the beach than the boardroom.

"If an employer wants to have a more relaxed summer dress code, it should decide in advance what level of informality is acceptable and issue written guidelines so that employees are treated consistently," says Robin Shea, a labor and employment partner at Constangy, Brooks, Smith & Prophete. "To the extent possible, the guidelines should be gender-neutral and avoid referring to what 'men' should wear and what 'women' should wear. (In New York City, it is unlawful to have gender-specific dress and appearance codes.) One very simple example would be to say that sandals without socks or hose are allowed from Memorial Day to Labor Day, but no flip-flops. Or that jeans are allowed, but no cutoffs or ripped jeans."

Remember, too, that policies are just empty words if not enforced. Failing to call out someone wearing shorts or letting another worker take off when the vacation overlap limit has been reached sets the stage for anger and charges of favoritism.

Flexibility

Many leaders view summer as a time to go with the flow—as long as goals get accomplished. A manager might not sweat it when Carol occasionally returns 10 minutes late from enjoying lunch in the park or Bob leaves a half hour early on Wednesdays to catch the last few innings of his son's baseball game, as long as these employees turn in quality work and meet deadlines.

"Being somewhat lenient in the summer establishes a positive work environment and shows employees that

they are understood and appreciated,” says Lindsey Salas, communications director at North 6th Agency (N6A).

To further boost employee satisfaction during this special time of year, some companies make flexibility par for the course.

“For our employees, to be more flexible during the summer hours, we provide them with the opportunity to flex their time four hours every week,” says Shawn Breyer, owner of Breyer Home Buyers.

“If they want to work a half-day on Friday and leave four hours early (or any other day), we allow them to take off without using PTO, and then they can either make that time up the next week or the week prior. It really boosts morale to allow people the flexibility to go enjoy their lives. We believe that family and life outside of work is very important, and we try to foster that.”

While the ultimate decision on how to handle summer rules rests with the company and its leadership, it pays to remember that treatment during this season won’t be forgotten.

Just as memories of family picnics and lazy hours by the pool get recalled fondly in the dead of winter, your warm actions will too.