

Canadians not taking much-needed vacation

by Mark Pavilons

The ant is knowing and wise, but he doesn't know enough to take a vacation.

Laurence Day

Canadians are a proud bunch.

We're decent folks and yet we just don't understand how important it is to take time off.

According to a study commissioned by travel company Skyscanner, 96 per cent of Canadians say it's important for them to take time off work, but only 66 per cent take all of the time they're owed. This has given rise to a new term ???vacation shaming.

Most prevalent among millennials, nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) say they've encountered ?vacation shaming in the workplace.

The study of 1,000 Canadians and 500 Americans, conducted by research firm Maru/Blue, showed that 50 per cent of Canadians have experienced vacation shaming, where co-workers or bosses use guilt or peer pressure to discourage employees from using their vacation time.

Trends differ south of the border, too, with only 57 per cent of Americans taking all their vacation time, and 58 per cent saying they've experienced vacation shaming, an increase of eight per cent over Canadians.

Many of us assume that taking time off will negatively impact our career trajectory, but evidence suggests employees that take their vacation have increased productivity, creativity, and decreased stress and risk of burnout, making them more likely to get promotions and raises, said Dr. Lisa Bélanger, a behaviour change expert who specializes in helping employees maximize their mental and physical well-being. Ultimately, the payoffs are significant for both the employer and the employee.

Affordability and busy work schedules among top vacation concerns

Millennials across Canada are most likely to feel nervous, stressed, worried, guilty or ashamed when asking for time off work (33 per cent), compared to Gen Xers at 17 per cent and Boomers at 12 per cent. They were also least likely to say they use all their vacation time, with only 60 per cent taking all the time they've earned.

When asked why they don't use all their vacation time, Canadians cited several concerns, including being too busy at work (22 per cent), being unable afford to take a vacation (17 per cent), and not wanting to have more work waiting for them when they get back (8 per cent).

Guilty as charged. For me, it's not so much a lack of desire, but it's more of a necessity. I am pretty much a one-man operation and the paper would face some serious challenges if I took a week or two away.

My wife works for the Peel District School Board as a TA and she has her summer free. However, she's not paid for those two months so again, she must find work during the summer.

I'm not sure, but our plight can't be uncommon among average working Canadians.

The time we have away is cherished dearly. The last time away was the long Labour Day weekend, where we grabbed some R&R at a lake-front home in Prince Edward?County. We crammed as much as we could into those two and a half days!

The last time I was out of the country, was a trip to Mexico with my mom, which turned out to be her last. She enjoyed it thoroughly.

There are things you notice when travelling, and one is the number of Germans who flock to the beaches. Germans take their holiday time seriously, and it seems like the entire country shuts down.

By law, every country in the European Union gives workers at least four work weeks of paid vacation. Austria has a legal minimum of 22 paid vacation days and 13 paid holidays each year. One in four Americans does not have a single paid day off.

I am also reminded of the beautiful word 'siesta,' Spanish for nap. Who doesn't love the luxury of taking a short nap in the afternoon, after the mid-day meal?

It's not only tradition, but almost mandatory in some countries.

The health benefits have been proven, and the siesta habit is associated with a 37 per cent reduction in coronary mortality, possibly due to reduced cardiovascular stress mediated by daytime sleep.

Siesta is also common in Italy, where many museums, churches and shops close during midday (from 12 to 1:30 or 2:30 to 4) so proprietors can go home for lunch and sometimes a nap during the day's hottest hours.

For anyone who's been away to Caribbean or such European countries, they quickly see the much slower pace. Our counterparts understand the need for eliminating stress and simply taking it easy. Kim and I always loved being 'on island time.'

It's not that things don't get done, they just take a bit longer. It's a win-win situation that North Americans have yet to embrace.

Perhaps we never will.

I urge everyone to sit back, relax and smell the freshly-baked goodies this holiday season. Recharge and rekindle some flames.

The new year will be here soon enough. There's no sense worrying over it just yet.

All the best this holiday season!