

Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

TAKE YOUR LEAVE

Imagine your boss telling you he is reducing your salary by 8% a year. What would your reaction be? Disgust? Revolt? And yet, every year, thousands of workers and managers give themselves pay cuts by not taking their full leave.

I don't know about you, but I get the feeling my leave is getting shorter every year, and I often return feeling that I've just started to relax. This is not helped by the increasingly prevalent sms-es and emails that can reach you wherever you are.

However, the Kenyan standard is 21 working days leave a year, and yet it is becoming an issue that more and more managers, (especially the more senior, who either love their jobs or feel they have to stay in control), are hardly taking leave. It's quite common to ring someone at the office and for them to say, "well, I'm meant to be on leave, but just had to pop in for a few hours". Some companies seem to run on a culture of presenteeism, with people starting early, staying late or even turning up on the weekends 'just in case' the boss asks for them. So we've now reached the stage we're working longer hours without getting over-time as well as cutting back on taking leave. Granted, this might be a new concern in the workplace in Kenya, but we should address these attitudes before we become like America or UK. In America workers get two weeks leave a year, and if a company decides to close for a few days during the Christmas/New Year period the working days involved are automatically docked by some of their employees leave. In the UK a recent survey found that nearly 60% of workers had no holidays planned for the next year and 75% of those who had taken leave had found it boring.

But before employers celebrate this new paradigm shift, we should all consider the results of a workaholic workforce: high stress levels, low motivation, fast burn-out, high sickness days and longer hours needed from staff to get less done. Before employers gleefully buy-out leave or watch staff 'save up' years worth of time off, they should learn from Microsoft, in the US, which does not allow staff to sell leave, and in fact, encourages them to buy up an extra 5 days off a year.

Of course, some people are passionate about their work and dread being out of touch, but for the majority, leave time is an important re-connection time with family, as well as allowing us space and time to set personal goals and re-evaluate our careers.

So next time you are due leave, do yourself, your family and your employer a favour: take leave! Try to take at least two weeks at a time, don't 'pop into' the office – in fact, try to be disciplined and organized enough to leave town without leaving anything important hanging (so that you can relax without feeling guilty). Better yet, try to be brave enough to not get roaming, don't take that lap-top and turn off your mobile! Then, sit back and enjoy... you deserve it!

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