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People Feature

How to beat post-holiday blues

By Lin Jing January 6, 2016

Returning to the office in January with memories of holiday celebrations or exotic vacations still fresh can present a challenge to immediately rediscovering motivation. There are, however, some simple steps employees and managers can take to quickly beat post-holiday blues and avoid a slow start to the year.

Post-holiday blues can induce depression and lethargy among some employees, but they can also contribute to increased stress levels and a dip in productivity in the workplace.



Simon Rego, Montefiore Medical Center & Albert Einstein College of Medicine

It is common for most people to feel low on energy when returning to their normal work routine, but the effects vary greatly in intensity in different people, according to Simon Rego, New York-based director of psychology training at Montefiore Medical Center and Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

While most employees manage to shake their post-vacation blues in a matter of hours or a day or two at most, for some the transition period back to work after an extended break can prove more difficult, and they may need even longer to adjust, which can be a drag on performance, says Rego.

The longer the break is, the more likely people are to get vacation blues and the more intense the symptoms would be, he adds.

Along with lower motivation and a dip in productivity, Rego says, post-holiday depression can also lead employees to call in sick or leave the office early, and higher levels of irritability raise the chances of interpersonal conflict at the office.

Shaking the blues

The key to quickly conquering post-holiday depression in the office would appear to lie primarily in mental fortitude and being able to put negative thoughts in perspective.

When returning to work after a long, relaxing period switched off from work obligations, the tendency, Rego says, is for employees to exaggerate negative aspects of their job, such as the amount of work they have to tackle.

The same stack of projects waiting to be dealt with, therefore, would appear much more daunting in the first week of January than they would have at the start of December or will appear in a few weeks' time.

The best way to mitigate post-vacation blues, according to Rego, is to simply recognise this difference in perception and challenge any negative thoughts head on. He also suggests it could help employees to recall previous instances of post-holiday blues and how long it took to come out the other side unscathed.

The role of managers

If a bout of post-vacation blues may impede the productivity of a team, then it would be beneficial for supervisors to take steps to help ease employees back into their normal routine work. Rego recommends managers in fact cut their employees some slack in the first few days upon returning from holiday by temporarily lowering expectations and work load.

Assuring a backup colleague covers an employee during the course of leave so that a backlog of work is prevented and having this colleague brief the returning employee on what he has missed out on can also help him get up to speed more quickly.

Arranging a team gathering or lunch in the first few days after a holiday may also provide somewhat of a boost to sentiment in the office.

Set goals beforehand

At certain points of the year, numerous public holidays mean many employees take concurrent or consecutive vacations.

In Hong Kong, Christmas and New Year holidays are followed quickly by Chinese New Year at the end of January or February, often creating a stop-start beginning to each year.



John Mullally, Robert Walters

Business can be slow, and productivity can really suffer in the first six weeks of the year, according to John Mullally, Hong Kong-based director for financial services at recruitment firm Robert Walters.

To prevent a slowdown, managers could work with employees to set performance goals before they leave for vacation so employees have prescribed work plans and targets they can immerse themselves in once they return to the office, says Walters.

In this way, when employees are away on holiday they can put work and career aspirations to the back of their mind but return to the office with clearer motivation and better understanding of what they want to achieve.

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