

Member's Quarterly

Summer 2025 Edition

Feature

Summer Fridays All Year Round?

Employee leave arrangements are changing

There used to be a time when almost everything shut down for the summer as people took their annual two, three or four week vacations. Now, people take breaks all throughout the year and employees are as flexible about the time off as they are about their work schedule, or where they even work. It's more likely to find a deserted office during Fridays in July and August as many staff opt for extra long weekends or 'summer Fridays' as a way to beat the summer heat. The whole 'summer Friday' thing has morphed from a special arrangement that required permission to a tacitly agreed upon perk that employees have come to expect from their organization.

There is still a drop in office attendance during the summer. One recent study in New York City found that there was a definite slump in people actually heading into work, beginning in early July and peaking through August. But the same tracking showed that there was an even bigger slump in office attendance during the winter months, especially between American Thanksgiving and Christmas. Employees are picking and choosing their optimal times to take time away from the formal workspace.

In the US, workers are back to taking up their usual allotment of paid days off after a drop during the pandemic. That pattern remains true in Canada and the latest data shows that the numbers are rising as well. In 2022, an ADP Canada poll found that 29 percent of respondents say they'll take all their vacation time and 75 percent of workers will take time off work over the holidays. That's still a lot of paid vacation time left on the table, in both summer and throughout the year.

But the new theme for workers in both countries appears to be flexibility versus following previous patterns. Many employers are happy to play along, as long as their employees are engaged and productive when they are at work. The standard vacation break has been replaced by a combination of year-round flexible scheduling, working from home and things like meeting-free Fridays and mental health days off throughout the year.

This includes the aforementioned "summer Fridays" that have now morphed into year-round flexible Fridays. It's hard to gather Canadian data on this, but in the US, almost 20% of workers report that their employer offers some version of this benefit, according to a study from Dayforce, a global HR consulting firm. This should not be surprising, since 2022, Friday has consistently been the most popular day to work from home among hybrid workers. They have just moved a pandemic phenomenon into the mainstream.

What is the impact of these changes in leave and vacation patterns? It's probably too early to tell. First of all, the actual research is very limited and secondly, it feels like lots of aspects of work and the working relationship are still in flux post-pandemic. We know that working from home and hybrid work will continue at variable rates for the considerable future because the arrangement seems to be working for everyone - at least for now.



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The other thing that is really clear is that flexibility will be the watchword for all types of employer-employee relationships and that will apply to benefits, hours of work and all leave arrangements. Furthermore, it's not limited to summer vacations either. Employees with school-age children need and are asking for additional time off in September and through March break and professional development days. The many different cultures now represented in the workforce have even shifted how employers manage holiday leave. It used to mean looking at a Christmas break or shutting down operations during that festive season. Now some employees are asking for accommodations to celebrate Hannukah or Diwali or other religious events and celebrations.

Moving forward, employers will have to monitor their employees and their workplaces to ensure that they maintain control even as they practice patience and flexibility with their staff when it comes to leave issues. One reason to do this is to ensure that people are not abusing their benefits, but even more importantly might be to ensure that they are taking regular and healthy breaks from work. Some companies do things like team-wide days off where nobody is permitted to be at work or on site. Others create guidelines that provide suggestions for employees to tune out and take time away from work. The truth is that almost anything will work as long as it is flexible, adaptable and agreeable to both parties.

Enjoy your 'summer Fridays' all year long.

Members Quarterly Staff Writer