

Coping with Summer Vacations at Your Small Business

During the summer, it may be true that “the living is easy,” as the old song goes. The midyear season, though, is often not so easy at small businesses because many employees are taking vacations. Total work hours often shrink and so may company productivity.

Spreading vacation time over the rest of the year might not be practical, especially if many of your workers have school-age children and desire family vacations during summer break. You may prefer to squeeze most vacations into the summer so the disruption is minimal the remainder of the year. Nevertheless, you probably won’t welcome a warm weather slowdown, so it’s best to take steps to keep things running at an acceptable pace.

Scheduling Strategies

It’s vital to create and maintain a visual schedule of who is taking time off and when. This might be created with a simple wall board or online. In a relatively small company, you could have your assistant keep up this schedule and show it to you every week or so. A larger firm could leave the schedule supervision to department or division heads, each of whom would track their workers.

However you decide to do it, you should have an easy way to see who will be away next week, the week after, and so on. If several people are scheduled for vacations during, say, the third week of July, you (or the manager who will be affected) might push forward some projects or delay them until you have a full crew in the office. Also, you probably should be cautious about approving additional vacation requests for weeks when multiple employees are already planning time off.

Reaching Out

Summer vacations can be extra troubling because your business won’t be the only one shorthanded from now until Labor Day. Chances are that your customers, suppliers, and other companies with which you work also will have employees who won’t be available. Their absence can put a crimp in your own operations. If you have strong relationships with such business associates, you might ask about their vacation schedules and who to contact if your company runs into a snag.

In some situations, you might decide to revise some of your company’s efforts to make the timing mesh with that of key outsiders.

Filling the Gaps

There is not much you can do about vacationing employees elsewhere, but there are things you can do this summer to help your company manage with a reduced workforce. If there are deadlines, require employees to finish all projects before they leave. For ongoing efforts, have your workers write up a summary of work-to-date with helpful materials attached. Get mobile numbers and email addresses where they can be reached, in case a need for contact should arise.

Make sure employees place vacation responses on their work phones and email, with dates of departures and returns. You might consider assigning someone to create templates for these employees to use for their vacation responses; this can assure that vacation responses will contain the required information and without any comments that could offend or reveal confidential matters.

In addition, arrange for some employees to cover for those on vacation, if necessary. You're probably better off if you can avoid one-on-one coverage because the worker staying at the office will be doing two jobs. Work sharing among multiple co-workers might be a better solution. If you have summer interns, ask if they might be able to handle some of the tasks usually assigned to the vacationers.

Clarity Begins at Home

With all this planning, don't forget to schedule your own vacation. Obviously, you also work hard throughout the year, so some downtime will be beneficial, whether you travel or wind down at home.

In addition, you should keep track of what unexpected flaws arise this vacation season and how you might remedy them in 2019. Should you require all summer vacation requests two weeks, or even a month, ahead of time? Demand that all requests be turned in by Memorial Day before you grant any approvals? Treat conflicts in favor of seniority? Offer those who lose out by conflict a chance to jump the line next year? The more clarity in a vacation plan you disseminate to all employees, the greater the chance your company will keep operating at its peak this summer and next.