

We want shorter holidays

BY VIRGINIA MATTHEWS

Chaos on return to work makes staff rethink

As many as 43 per cent of office workers will return to their desks this month to find a mountain of work left by uncooperative colleagues who either refuse to cover or do so incompetently, according to a new survey by the recruitment firm Manpower.

With only one employer in ten prepared to fund temporary cover for staff holidays, the feeling of wellbeing that most of us have after time away is being destroyed by the chaos when we return. Yet there is an upside.

Buried under hundreds of outstanding e-mails and piles of filing, many of us choose September and October to reassess our working lives, says Angela Baron, of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and may well make changes for the better. "Holidays allow us to recharge our batteries and to a certain extent come back to work with a blank sheet of paper. But for those of us who find our stress levels far higher on our return to work than they were before we went, it would appear that something really needs to change."

While some of us will choose autumn to up sticks and leave for a less demanding job, the more pragmatic may opt simply to forget holidays altogether, says CIPD.

With short breaks of less than a week replacing the traditional fortnight's holiday in many firms, staff report finding the burden of piled-up work more manageable.

In other firms, though, it is fast becoming the norm not to take a break at all. Two-thirds of managerial staff now enjoy at least five weeks of holiday entitlement, says the Chartered Management Institute, but the majority admit to working while officially on leave.

Almost half of the 6,000 managers polled recently by CMI said that they regularly checked work e-mails and four out of ten monitored their office voicemail

while away on leave.

But if you think there is one holiday that is sacrosanct, think again. In a recent poll of attitudes to Christmas working, more than a third of office staff said they were not looking forward to the festive season this year and would be happy to work throughout the Christmas break. As long as the price was right.

Top tips for bouncing back after holidays:

1. Set yourself a time limit for dealing with all backlogged work and prioritise ruthlessly.
2. Ensure that colleagues are up-to-speed with the essentials of your job so that they can deputise for you properly next time. Invite them to do the same.
3. Don't skip breaks or lunch to deal with old work
4. Make sure your boss knows the full extent of the backlog.
5. Book another break fast.

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JUN 2006
JOUR 2
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