

By *Ryan Murphy*

# CERIDIAN FLEXES ITS TIME-OFF POLICIES

*How the company is increasing engagement and productivity by letting employees manage their own time off*

**I**n today's busy workplaces, it can be challenging to take an hour or two off for an appointment or an unforeseen event. But what if the option is part of an employer's time-off policy?

Last year, Ceridian HCM Inc. began allowing its Canadian and American employees to take two hours off for any reason without manager approval. The program was introduced as a pilot, initially covering the period between late May and Labour Day, says Lisa Sterling, executive vice-president and chief people and culture officer at the organization's head office in Nebraska.

"The premise of the program was really any employee — regardless of role, level, employment type — could take two hours off at any time without needing manager approval and they could use it really for any purpose — if they were going to a kid's soccer game, to go for a spa day, whatever."

It became a full-time policy as the year progressed. "It went over with overwhelming success. We saw an immediate impact on our engagement levels with flexibility," says Sterling, noting employees' productivity was also positively affected. "We found people to actually be more productive in the time that they were here."

## Flex it out

Beginning July 1, 2018, the company also introduced a flexible vacation policy, allowing employees to take as much or as little time off as they want.

"We don't call it unlimited, we call it flexible," says Sterling. "We think the connotation around unlimited, in all the research we've done, we've seen that to be somewhat detrimental to programs, in the sense that when people feel like they've got an unlimited amount of time away from work, they don't actually take the same amount of time away, they tend to take less time. We really wanted it to be about flexibility and empowerment."

The organization's people and culture team will be producing quarterly utilization reports to share with its leaders, she adds. "Not to address who is using it, but to address who is not."

While the new policies aim to change the mindset of employees, Ceridian has also gathered important information about how its staff view time off in terms of benefits, recognition and the company's commitment to them, says Stirling.

"The other thing we've seen already that's incredibly positive is the feedback from our employees about how they truly believe that we trust them, that they do feel empowered and that we're elevating this whole concept of flexibility to an entirely new level here at Ceridian, which are all the reasons we wanted to do this," she says.

"I have a very strong belief that if you create experiences that allow people to be the best versions of themselves at home, then you get the best version of themselves at work."

Ceridian is also focused on using the flexible time-off policies to drive employee engagement and provide greater opportunities for wellness, notes Sterling. "We truly believe that if people are getting the time to step away from their life at Ceridian, they have the opportunity to recharge, to take some downtime, to be a more healthy and well version of themselves at home, and then come back to Ceridian. And we know that people who take that time actually do have higher levels of productivity, they do have higher levels of engagement, they think better."

## Flexible challenges

In the case of unlimited vacation policies, many Toronto-based technology companies are looking into the option, according to Marion Halmos, a senior specialist with Salopek & Associates Ltd.



## WHERE DO CANADIANS STAND ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

While Canadian workers received an average of **19** vacation days in 2017, they only took an average of **17** days off.

**30%** of Canadians reported they work during their vacation.

**21%** said they check email and voicemail daily while on vacation.

**35%** said their workload following a vacation affects its length.

Source: Expedia survey, 2017

“I have spoken with several chief executive officers and several human resources leaders who would like to try that or are already there,” she says. “The general consensus is there needs to be a strong objectives and key results process in place for it to work. And, in conjunction with that, a higher accountability culture. Leadership needs to be outcomes-focused rather than activity-focused.”

On the other hand, Cissy Pau, a principal consultant at Vancouver-based Clear HR Consulting Inc., says she isn’t seeing a lot of companies introducing the policy. Organizations can get into trouble with these types of programs, she warns, if performance expectations aren’t clearly communicated to employees at the outset.

“I think, conceptually, it sounds like a really great idea,” says Pau. “Employees

are self-managing, they take ownership of their time, they can control their time better, it’s within the employee’s control. It sounds really good. But I think, practically speaking, it doesn’t always work. And it’s not going to work in all environments.”

As a case in point, Halmos offers the example of an organization that introduced unlimited vacation for its company partners, with the aim that these employees, who had a stake in the business, would achieve their objectives and take the vacation required. However, she notes, in reality, these employees actually averaged less time away than other staff members. 📱

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