

# U.S. needs to close the vacation gap

**Kathy Hedberg/Lewiston Tribune**

Have you read those statistics that show U.S. workers have the fewest paid vacation days of all the developed countries in the world, compared to Europeans, who laze around the pool and get paid for it almost as much as they're on the job?

According to the Center for Economic Policy and Research, the average private-sector U.S. worker receives 16 paid vacation days and holidays a year. One in four Americans does not have a single paid day off, the center reports, and there is no legal requirement for employers to provide any paid vacation.

Austria, on the other hand, has a legal minimum of 22 paid vacation days and 13 paid holidays each year. Workers in France and Germany have at least a month of paid vacation each year, in addition to paid state holidays.

There are also reports showing U.S. citizens are way down the list when it comes to academic achievement and technical ability needed for premium jobs.

So what this seems to say is that while Americans are working longer and harder than those bums in Europe and the rest of the world, we are apparently a lot dumber.

If we were smarter, we might figure out a way to get more vacation.

The problem is, even when Americans are on vacation a lot of them are not really on vacation.

You'll see people sitting in a chair at the beach checking their smartphones; arranging conference calls while the rest of the family is having a barbecue, or checking their messages at every truck stop on the trip that has free Wi-Fi.

Maybe it's just that we have a better work ethic, but possibly we Americans are scared those Europeans who supposedly are smarter and better rested might take our jobs.

Vacation, as they say, is more a state of mind than the place you're in. I know people who easily blend the two, and their summer tans seem to last all year long.

A friend of mine is on a business trip to Chicago, manning a booth at what he said is a boring trade fair. He and his buddy decided to liven it up and attract customers by playing bluegrass music during the day and inviting browsers to bring their instruments and play along.

It's going great, he tells me. People are swarming to their booth and they're not only getting more contracts, they're having fun.

I worry about my younger son, Danny, who makes optical lasers and works such long hours. But he loves his job and says it's like going to work and playing with Legos all day.

If you can't get away for vacation, bring the vacation to you.

For me, there is a clear distinction between work and vacation. When I'm on vacation I sit around in a lawn chair, drink iced tea and make it a point not to do a single productive thing all day.

Sometimes I'm doing the same thing when I'm working. But I somehow manage to come up with a column.

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