

## Staying engaged in the workforce this summer

By Heather Boulger

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Jeannie Miliotis digs into a big slice of watermelon when the town of Peru's 250th anniversary last summer. Eating watermelon is one of the traditional pleasures of summer, but the season is also a time when people can enhance their workforce skills.

**STEPHANIE ZOLLSHAN — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE**

PITTSFIELD — The sights and sounds of summer are here. The beach, parks and road trips — summer is all about fun in the sun.

Here are some fun seasonal facts to consider as we head into the dog days of summer:

- Watermelon is summer's most popular vegetable. It is part of the cucumber, pumpkin, and squash family. The average American eats 15 pounds of watermelon a year and these juicy favorites are 92 percent water.
- July is National Ice Cream Month. More Americans buy ice cream in July than any other month.
- August is the busiest month for travel and tourism, a sector that employs more than 8,000 people in the Berkshires.

With all of this going on, summer can be one of the most challenging times to keep employees engaged. There are days — especially Friday afternoons — when people’s minds wander to other things like taking an extended lunch or leaving work early. Here are some ways companies can help shake up normal routines to help employees remain productive while still enjoying the summer.

- Encourage employees to go outside for a walk around the block, or participate in company-sponsored hiking or yoga, or other wellness activities to engage in team building while getting a breath of fresh air. Many Berkshire venues offer special deals on these activities at this time of year.
- Summer is the perfect time to remind employees to rest, recharge and vacation. Encourage vacations and long weekends to help employees get energized.
- Review flexible work schedules that allow employees to leave early on Fridays or increase the amount of time they can work remotely so they can spend more time with their families.

On the other side, 68 percent of American workers report that they work while on vacation. It seems like employee workloads have increased and folks are more stressed than normal trying to keep up. Every industry is feeling the impact of an economic downturn, and people are shortening their vacations to accommodate a heavier to-do list. It’s important for employers to create space for their employees to disconnect so they can rest, recuperate and recharge to prevent burnout.

Perhaps it’s not wanting to return to a mountain of emails or the workload growing while away, but it’s important to recapture your vacation so you can refresh. Vacations let you catch your breath, distance yourself from the daily grind. They are proven to reduce stress, and improve both mental health and clarity of thought.

Here are a few ways to disconnect:

- Set up your out-of-office time and inform people in advance when you'll be away.
- Keep your team aware of lingering projects and designate someone to be a decision maker.
- Leave your work devices at your workspace.
- Set aside an extra day off to catch up with everything when you return to work.

Summer is a great time to relax and recharge, but don't let this season pass by without taking advantage of another opportunity that can offer a ton of benefits — summer jobs.

Whether you are a young person just starting out, a college student returning for the summer, or a seasoned pro looking for a job change, summer can be an ideal time to test the waters on a new opportunity. While working may not sound like the ideal way to spend the warm summer months, it can be a great opportunity to make some money on the side, as well as create connections and develop the skills that can help you take your next big career step.

Many are lounging at the beach or chilling on the couch this summer, but the jobs are out there. You have to be just as eager to pursue them as you are to soak up the rays. Visit MassHire Berkshire Career Center in person or online to learn about the myriad number of employment opportunities that exist o get you started.

The COVID-19 pandemic put a significant damper on summer job opportunities, but those numbers are slowly rebounding. Last summer, more than 55 percent of young people ages 16-to-24 were employed during the summer months, a steady increase over the previous two years.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than one-third of teenagers employed last summer worked in accommodations and food services. However, temporary and seasonal jobs abound across all levels and industries ranging in everything from warehousing and merchandising to clerical jobs to skilled trades.

The traditional “summer job” — teens working at a movie theater or fast-food joint — has changed as more workers of all ages see the advantages of temporary and seasonal work. More than 70 percent of Americans are expected to have some type of side gig in 2023. These jobs are particularly popular among college-age workers and early professionals. More than half of the gig economy is made up of people between the ages of 18 and 22.

As technology continues to advance quickly, “hard skills” may be a thing of the past. Employers today are craving talent with “soft skills” that can stand the test of time. Our local companies have identified five “power skills” that all workers should look to sharpen: communication, customer service, leadership, collaboration, and attention to detail. A summer job is a prime opportunity to gain valuable experience honing all of these skills to set yourself up for success with your next career move.

If you’re on a break from school or figuring out your next big job opportunity, use the summer months to get ahead. Add new experiences to your resume, and network, and figure out what your strengths are and where you can improve. Summer is definitely a time for fun, but it can also present a tremendous opportunity for learning and growth. That sounds fun to us.

Heather Boulger is the executive director of the MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board in Pittsfield.