

HR Connection

Summer 2014

■ ■ Help your employees make the most of their summer!



Quebec summers are short, and with only two or three weeks of vacation to take advantage of the warm weather, employees can start getting restless as they watch the summer pass them by from the window of their office. Here are a few ways you can help them make the most of their summer while being more productive and engaged at their desk!

1. **Provide outdoor tables and chairs for lunch and breaks.** Provided there is space, employers can also set up a badminton or volleyball net for some friendly tournaments!
2. **Start a walking club.** Every company usually has at least one employee for whom fitness and health is of high importance and they are usually more than happy to get their less-active colleagues moving by leading a short lunchtime power walk. Perhaps you even have a tai chi or yoga instructor on staff that is willing to lead some energizing fitness lunches?
3. **Join a corporate sports league.** In many areas corporate softball or soccer leagues exist and companies can join for a minimal cost. Not only is it a great way to build team spirit, but often families

get involved by coming by to cheer on their loved ones or substituting for team members on vacation. A great time -- win or lose!

4. **Sponsor a corporate team for a fundraising activity.** There is no end to the number of non-profit organizations that hold walks, runs, bike rides, or even boating events; to raise funds for their cause. Get employees involved in picking a cause that is dear to their heart so they can work as a team to raise money and train for the big day!
5. **Ice cream day!** Surprise employees by bringing in some cold treats! Nothing says summer better than a Popsicle dripping all over your keyboard.
6. **Offer summer hours or a compressed workweek.** Many companies are now allowing employees to get the weekend off to an early start by closing early on Fridays in the summer. Can't afford to let employees leave early? Another option is to offer a compressed workweek in the summer. For example, four 10-hour days, but Fridays' off.
7. **Offer part-time work schedules or leaves of absence.** For many businesses summers can be a quiet period but companies do not want to force reduced work hours for fear of losing employees or causing disgruntlement. Why not offer it to those interested? Certain employees may appreciate being able to voluntarily go down to a part-time work week for the summer, or even take an unpaid summer off to spend time with their families or travel.

■ ■ Some lesser known facts about vacation laws in Quebec



While most employers are aware of the general rules surrounding an employee's right to take vacation as determined by the Loi sur les normes du travail, here are some lesser known facts:

1. Vacation is accumulated during one reference year, to be taken during the following reference year. During the reference year, set as May 1 to April 30 by law (although this period can be different if the company so chooses and has a clear policy regarding the reference period in place), employees are only entitled to take vacation time, or use vacation money accrued during the previous reference year. If an employer allows employees to use vacation time as it is accumulated, this time can be considered as anticipated vacation and may not count towards actual vacation time. An error that can be quite costly for employers who would be forced to let employees retake their previous vacation.
2. Ultimately it is up to employers to determine an employee's vacation dates. While most employers allow employees the courtesy of choosing their preferred vacation dates, the law provides that employers can choose the dates of the employee's vacation with four weeks of notice.
3. Employees are allowed to take their vacation time in consecutive weeks. Any internal policy stating that employees cannot take more than two weeks in a row is not valid under the law. Employees are also allowed to choose to take their vacation in two separate periods unless the company officially closes for an amount of time equal to or longer than the length of vacation to which the employee is entitled.
4. Employees with two weeks of vacation are allowed to take a third week off at their own expense. The third week does not have to be consecutive to the other two weeks.
5. Employees continue to accumulate vacation during certain leaves, such as the 18 weeks of [maternity leave](#), the 5 weeks of [paternity leave](#), or up to 26 weeks of sick leave during a 12 month period. No vacation is accumulated during [parental leave](#).
6. Vacation pay is accumulated on all earnings during the reference year including overtime pay, commissions, bonuses and tips.

■ ■ 5 HR Practices your growing company should improve right now!

While priorities can vary greatly from one company to the other, small companies that are in the process of becoming mid-sized can generally benefit from adding greater structure to their HR practices. Here are 5 essential HR projects to tackle this summer:

- 1. New employee orientation program.** Since growth usually equals hiring, best to plan out how these new employees will be integrated into the company. Whether it's a question of introducing them to the company's culture, ensuring that they are rapidly and adequately trained for their new position, or simply showing them the ropes, a proper orientation program will help turn new employees into long-standing ones.
- 2. Employee Policy Manual.** Recommended for companies of 10 employees or more (and essential, in our opinion, for 25 employees or more), a policy manual ensures equity and clarity of company practices, provides guidance to management and can help ensure legal compliance and protection. Already have one? Now is a good time to give it a good review. With a constantly changing legal environment, certain policies, such as policies on social media could likely be added and other policies like employee privacy and computer usage could probably use an update.
- 3. Job descriptions.** These can be a critical tool for companies that are in a period of evolution. Not only do they provide employees and management with a clear picture of each person's roles and responsibilities, they will become essential in determining changes to positions or business processes, which is likely to happen often in a growing business. They will also be required during recruitment to prepare job postings, set expectations for candidates and determine appropriate hiring requirements.
- 4. Performance evaluations.** Most small businesses do not have a formal performance review process, and while informal feedback may have worked well with a few employees, providing timely and pertinent assessments on performance will quickly become crucial. Some considerations will include the time of year and with what frequency performance will be evaluated, whether performance will be linked with compensation and what criteria will be used to establish good performance. Management must also be properly trained, not only on the appraisal form and process, but on how to provide employees with relevant feedback all year long.
- 5. Ensuring legal compliance.** Has the company grown from a few employees to over 10? The company will likely have to comply with the Pay Equity Act so start looking into your obligations to ensure that your company meets their deadline and avoids potential penalties. Has the company grown to a salary mass of over \$1-million/ year? The company will have to ensure it is in compliance with the Loi sur les compétences, commonly known as the 1% Training Law. The government has recently been auditing company's compliance with more frequency and in greater detail, so best to ensure everything is in order to avoid nasty surprises when the tax man comes to visit. Lastly, the government is in the process of implementing the new Voluntary Retirement Savings Plan so your company will need to know whether they will be required to join, and what their deadline will be.

Need help putting in place your HR Projects?

Our HR Consulting team, specialized in HR for small and medium sized businesses, will be happy to help, customizing HR practices to your business's culture and industry. Whether it is to handle a project from A to Z, or simply to review work done by an internal resource, our team is there for you.

Many HR projects are eligible to subsidies with Emploi-Quebec which can cover up to 40% of fees!

Contact us at hr@flmontreal.com for more information.



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Please note that the information provided in this bulletin consists of general guidelines and that there are many exceptions and special cases that could apply.



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