

Blue Zones

“Love is not as important as good health. You cannot be in love if you’re not healthy. You can’t appreciate it. – Bryan Cranston

Blue Zones – Downshift into 2020



Bonita Springs Area Chamber of Commerce members bring their dogs to work on Fridays. SUBMITTED PHOTOS

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In 2018, Americans left 768 million days of vacation on the table according to the U.S. Travel Association. By December, more than half of us (55%) wind up forfeiting unused vacation days because we were too focused on work to plan a vacation or take time off.

While employees often feel they are showing dedication and commitment to the job by relinquishing their vacation, employers report seeing higher productivity, improved mental focus and less burnout from employees who take vacation. In other words, jet setting employees are more valuable.

Blue Zones Project Approved Worksites are advised to view vacation as a mutual endeavor. Employers must create an environment where taking vacation is encouraged and discussed often enough for employees to feel like it is culturally acceptable, even appreciated when they take time off.

Jan. 28 is National Plan for Vacation Day. The premise of this recognition date is to encourage Americans to be intentional about their vacation planning. This can help employees identify their peak workload periods and when to anticipate needing time to take a break, destress and build resiliency.

To be even more effective, work teams can plan their vacations jointly to not only ensure that everyone is using their time, but to build communication, support and proper coverage. Collectively recognizing that em-



Bonita Springs Elementary School teachers host a plant-based, low-sugar breakfast.

ployees who are parents might need the holidays and spring break off due to childcare, or discussing who makes an annual fall trip ‘back home,’ for example, can build connection, empathy and teamwork among the group. Who knows? You might also discover that Marge in accounting has a time share in Maui that’s open in April!

Daily down shifting can be just as important as taking vacation time. The following Blue Zones Project Worksites have created

unique, mini vacations to encourage well-being, and help stay active and engaged in the office.

■ Naples Coastal Animal Hospital purchased hammocks for their employees to step outside, take a break and swing in the trees to relieve tension and connect with nature.

■ City of Naples has created a walking program with an app that tracks steps and shares collective progress among participants. They can see who needs encouragement and how close the team is to their goal. Employees are inspired to take breaks to walk outside. Over 25% of employees are participating.

■ The Bonita Springs Area Chamber of Commerce team eats lunch together in the HUB without the presence of computer screens. This allows them to connect with each other, eat mindfully and down shift. Employees are also welcome to bring their dogs to work on Fridays.

■ Instead of coffee and donuts, teachers at Bonita Springs Elementary hosted a plant-based, low sugar Potluck Moai. Their morning break included networking, eating healthy and sharing great recipes.

■ The Naples Players offers free yoga and Improv for Mental Health Classes to their employees.

Mark your calendar for Jan. 28. Throw a dart at the map and plan your vacation! Your boss and co-workers will thank you.

Megan Greer is Worksite Lead for the Blue Zones Project-Southwest Florida.