

Don't get left behind about leave

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WHEN it comes to job hunting, it is always a good idea to take a look at the prospective employer's leave policy.

No matter how much you love your job, we all need time away to relax, destress and recharge.

It is also of paramount importance, once you have signed on the dotted line, to plan your annual leave well in advance.

Being both a client and candidate-centric recruitment agency, we encourage a partnership approach between employer and employee.

More and more, we observe that the month of December is accepted by our clientele as yet another production month, and, in many cases, an especially busy, if not the busiest, month of the year.

To avoid disappointment, it is therefore recommended that you plan your leave period at least six to 12 months in advance, and engage with your employer on the optimum time to enjoy mandatory leave periods offered.

The counting game

While there are minimum requirements, you will find that some companies are more generous than others when it comes to annual, special, study and family responsibility leave.

Some even offer incentive leave, but these are in the minority. Unless you have been with the same company for some time, it often takes years to accumulate what many would deem a sufficient number of leave days.

So, if you are in the job market, investigate the company's policy, as this may affect your final decision.

The December finish line

As the end of the year – when employees were pulling the short straw to see who would be the one

who manned the office while colleagues treated themselves to a holiday at some exotic destination – we took a quick snapshot of how our engineering, insurance, finance and IT clients managed their respective leave structures.

Leave, especially year-end leave, is always a bone of contention.

No matter how fraught the previous December holidays were with demanding in-laws, bored children and way too much food, we all want to take leave at the end of the year.

Despite this, there will be moments when you wish you were manning the (in some cases) deserted fort, in peace and solitude.

Most companies are fairly accepting when it comes to accommodating new staff members' leave plans over December – even if one has to carry over a deficit number into the next year.

However, be sure to ask before having to forfeit an international holiday that you may have already saved and paid a deposit for.

All companies pay out annual leave should you resign. Nevertheless, each company has a limit regarding how much you can accumulate or will be paid out for.

When it comes to accumulating leave, some companies allow only six months' accrual, while others offer up to 24 months.

Study leave seems to be an accepted given all over, with more provided for postgraduate degrees.

Conversely, some employers stipulate that studious employees will be considered only as having taken study leave should they pass their subjects. Fail to make the grade, and this time will be deducted from your annual leave.

Paternity leave

In SA, new dads tend to fare less favourably in terms of paternity leave when compared with many of our European counterparts.

Still, daddy can use what is called family care or family responsibility leave – which ranges from three to five days – to bond with his new little bundle of joy.

Religious holidays

Religious holidays are confined to those gazetted by the government, but all companies will understand staff taking further holidays, which will be deducted from an employee's annual leave.

Being unwell

Sick leave is intended for just that – paid days that are allocated to rest and recuperate when you are unwell.

A general rule is 30 to 33 days sick leave over a three-year period. Doctor's certificates must be produced should staff be struck down by the mysterious long-weekend bug, which can sometimes attack suddenly on any given Friday or Monday.

One company interviewed encourages staff to take proactive measures in sustaining good health by offering staff incentive leave for not taking any sick leave during the year.

So, when you examine new employee packages, make sure you enquire after the company's leave policy.

Ask whether this will change according to years served, degrees obtained or level reached.

It may just make all the difference to a well-deserved and earned year-end rest with friends and family, for both yourself and your boss.

Laura Hutchinson is managing director (Cape) of Communicate Personnel. For more information, visit www.communicate.co.za



FUN IN THE SUN: Remember that not everyone can go on leave over December, so check out your employer's leave policy before you take on a new job. **PICTURE: LEON LESTRADE**