Peak time

To be productive, so take that holiday, writes Natalie Skinner.

absenteeism – a big financial cost for businesses – declines when workers take regular holidays. In our 2010 work-life survey, when we asked workers why they didn’t take holidays, about 40 per cent said that work pressures or demands got in the way. Australia is already a hard-working country. To make us a “smart-working” country that values and respects holidays and other types of non-work time as well as productive work time, will involve some significant changes to the way we think about and manage our paid work, including holidays and leave.

Central to this “smart working” approach is for businesses, managers and supervisors to value and respect other life domains. In the working-time campaigns of the 19th century, workers won the right to an eight-hour day to have a decent quality of life. In the 21st century a large body of research suggests that we should also ensure that workers take their holidays. This is likely to not only improve our own quality of life but also bring productivity benefits to business.

Natalie Skinner is a senior research fellow at the Centre for Work and Life, University of South Australia.

Tools of the Trade

Bear spray

Name: Marg Leehane
Job: Lodge owner
Where: Great Bear Lodge, British Columbia (Canada)
Why is it important? My business is to take people out to see bears, and I see them on a daily basis from April to November, where I live on the coast of British Columbia. Bear spray is basically capsicum spray; it’s the same as the police use. For a bear it’s unpleasant, but it’s non-lethal – no one is dead, the bear or the person. I carry it every day, but it’s a tool of last resort. I’ve never used it, and have only drawn it once. I really respect bears; I’m alert around them, but not frightened. The problem comes when you surprise a bear; they think you are trying to hurt them.

What do your colleagues think? You don’t need bear spray in Melbourne, where I grew up, but eight years ago I moved here and graduated from koala bears to grizzly bears. You have to change your life to live around bears every day. You can’t go running, daydream or walk with your ipod.

Unusual moment? My husband and I were not being safe; we weren’t calling out to let the bears know we were coming. We bumped into a male and female sleeping – they were very frightened and ran away. But the male ran back to us, ears back...

[myp husband] Tom was yelling, which scares them off, and I had my bear spray drawn. It was really scary, but I learnt so many lessons.

How much does it cost? $50. We get it at our local fishing goods store. You can’t fly with it, so you can’t buy it and take it with you.

SUE WHITE