



**Why Your Company Should Have an
Appetite for Lunch**

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Introduction

Statistics show that the typical lunch break is not only shrinking, in some cases it is disappearing altogether. But is this really a good thing, especially when it comes to field workers?

Number crunchers would say that less lunch means more work is being done. Indeed, in Great Britain, the average worker spends just 29 minutes eating before they get back to business. The forfeited lunch time minutes add up to an extra 128 hours of work per year - equivalent to 16 eight hour days¹!

On the other hand, not taking a lunch break can lead to loss of productivity, irritability, stress and even actual health problems. New research indicates that skipping lunch costs businesses £50m a day due to dips in productivity²!

So the question arises; what is the best course - cancelling lunch altogether or finding a way to take it efficiently?

What the Critics are Saying

A survey³ by workplace consulting group Right Management in North America reported that 28% of employees are seldom taking any break. "All in all, 81% are not taking what used to be considered a real lunch break". In the UK, research by Aviva showed that 30% of employees admitted that they don't take lunch breaks⁴.

The shrinking lunch is a global trend throughout the industrialized world. In 2012, the average lunch

break in the UK was 33 minutes, but the latest survey shows it has shrunk by a further four minutes in 2013. Additionally, only 20 percent of people take a full hour for their lunch, around 25 percent say they take less time for their lunch now than they did a year ago, and workers aged 18 to 24 skip lunch six times a month on average and take only 28 minutes when they do break⁵!

While this might seem productive – because employees are “available” to work for more minutes each day – it “actually burns you in the long run”, according to Nancy Rothbard, a professor of management at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. “There is support for the idea that taking these breaks can actually help you do better and focus better on your work and have new ideas.” Rothbard told LiveScience⁶.

“Mental concentration is similar to a muscle,” says John P. Trougakos, an assistant management professor at the University of Toronto Scarborough and the Rotman School of Management, to the New York Times⁷. “It becomes fatigued after sustained use and needs a rest period before it can recover.”

A Buffet of Challenges

Rest breaks and most importantly lunch, should be important to employers for many reasons. Besides the legal requirements, there are productivity benefits, health and safety reasons, motivational and psychological reasons, union considerations as well

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1. Suzannah Hills , *Whatever happened to the lunch hour?* <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2268092/Whatever-happened-lunch-hour-How-breaks-reduced-just-29-minutes-busy.html#ixzz2cL4Cj5Xw>
 2. Bupa.com, *Reclaim the lunchbreak report: Research from a survey conducted amongst a nationally representative sample of adults working full time(1,011)* by Fly Research between 10 January – 13 January 2011.
 3. Survey by Right Management, Oct 2012. <http://www.right.com/news-and-events/press-releases/2012-press-releases/item23943.aspx>
 4. *Health of the workplace*. Aviva 2011
 5. Suzannah Hills , *Whatever happened to the lunch hour?*, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2268092/Whatever-happened-lunch-hour-How-breaks-reduced-just-29-minutes-busy.html#ixzz2cL4Cj5Xw>
 6. Stephanie Pappas, *livescience.com*, <http://www.livescience.com/22291-what-happened-lunch-break.html>
 7. phyllis korkki, *To Stay on Schedule, Take a Break*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/jobs/take-breaks-regularly-to-stay-on-schedule-workstation.html>



as overall employee job satisfaction. The importance and challenges of lunch breaks can be found in the following ingredients:

Productivity

Productivity is comprised of two aspects; organizational productivity and personal productivity. This is where the biggest challenge lies. On one hand, most research shows that a proper lunch break makes people more productive. On the other, a proper lunch break that is not scheduled in an optimal way will result in a lot of wasted time and loss of overall productivity to the business and to the individual. This is especially acute among field workers.

Field employees typically spend between 10% - 15% of their working hours on their lunch break⁸. If this time is not managed properly, it can have a major impact on mobile workforce utilization. Companies using manual scheduling systems rarely know how long or when personnel take breaks. Even companies with computerized systems cannot always schedule breaks efficiently.

This is because a service organization faces conflicting forces when planning lunch breaks: adhering to the limitations dictated by the unions and regulators, and maximizing the utilization of the field employees while leaving room for unexpected changes to the

daily schedule.

The impact on workers not taking a break is significant. According to research from Bupa, employees who don't take a lunch break - thinking that they are doing their bosses a favor - are actually costing businesses in the UK nearly £50 million a day! This is due to the fact that almost half (48 percent) feel their productivity levels plummet in the afternoon resulting in almost 40 minutes of lost productive time⁹.

Health and Safety Aspects

Eating lunch increases blood sugar levels which in turn aids concentration and brainpower. A dip in blood sugar that happens when a meal is missed (often known as the afternoon slump) can cause tiredness, mood changes and a loss of concentration. Having field service engineers return to a job done poorly or incorrectly adds to costs and frustrates customers.

Over a third (34 percent) of employees experience pressure from managers to work through their lunch hour while half feel the weight of their workload prevents them from taking a break¹⁰.

Not allowing enough time for lunch often leads field workers to choose fast-food alternatives that are rich in cholesterol, sugar and fats, increasing the chances

8. Give me a break, Hasa Lahav, <http://blogs.clicksoftware.com/clickipedia-blog/bid/92288/Give-Me-a-Lunch-Break>

9. Bupa.com, Reclaim the lunchbreak report: <http://www.bupa.co.uk/jahia/webdav/site/bupacouk/shared/Documents/PDFs/Business/workplace%20health/31376-RWM-%20reclaim-lunch-hour-leaflet-final.pdf>

10. Reclaim the lunch hour. Bupa 2011

of gaining weight and developing heart disease and other health concerns. Skipping lunch, or grabbing a quick snack behind the wheel, can also lead to gastric concerns, headaches, surliness etc.

In the UK, research shows that nearly 15% of employees believed their health has been affected because of unhealthy eating at work¹¹. Working through lunch can cause stress, and eating under pressure can lead to digestive problems. Sitting down to a proper lunch can give the muscles and joints a needed respite which can reduce the chances of joint and back pain.

In terms of safety, skipping a proper lunch can cause field workers to eat or snack while driving. Each day in the United States, more than 9 people are killed and more than 1,060 people are injured in crashes that are reported to involve a distracted driver engaging in activities that include eating and using a cell phone¹².

Research conducted by the University of Leeds¹³ shows that driver reaction times increased by 44 percent when eating behind the wheel. Additionally, when sipping a drink, reaction times of the motorist increased by over a fifth (22 percent) and 18 percent were more likely to experience poorer lane control. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) found eating and driving is more dangerous than using a handheld cell phone while driving¹⁴.

Motivational and Psychological Aspects

Working through lunch breaks can leave employees feeling overwhelmed, which reduces their motivation to work. This is referred to as burnout, and it is one of the reasons why employees need to step away from their job at lunch time, according to Beth Bracco Hering, from CNN¹⁵.

A lunch break with co-workers gives employees a chance to bond as a team. A lunch break spent with a significant other can help to improve an employee's attitude for the rest of the day and help improve employee morale.

A study in the Academy of Management Review¹⁶



highlighted that during a working day, we all need to exercise self-control over thoughts, emotions and behaviors, expending our psychological resources. Taking a lunch break during the day is an important opportunity for resource recovery and research has shown that it helps people concentrate and process information better in the afternoon.

A Bupa study shows that taking a lunch break can improve work quality since the time spent off the job gives employees an occasion to relax and refocus their efforts on being productive in the afternoon. Additional research shows that happy employees have 31% higher productivity, 37% higher sales and are three times more creative¹⁷!

There is no real need for research to determine that a worker who is able to rest, unwind and enjoy a meal without pressure is likely to be more relaxed, enjoy a higher level of overall job satisfaction and be more amenable to co-workers. In fact, a mid-day break is certain to have a positive effect on stress levels and the ability to deliver a higher level of customer service. The impact on customer engagement and customer satisfaction should not be discounted.

11. *Mental health and work*, many authors, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/212266/hwwb-mental-health-and-work.pdf

12. *Distraction.gov website*, <http://www.distraction.gov/content/get-the-facts/facts-and-statistics.html>

13. *Samantha Jamson, study, commissioned by esure car insurance and carried out by scientists at the University of Leeds*

14. *As reported by: the dietician* <http://www.dietitian.com/danger.html> and the *Telegraph*, and by: *The Telegraph*: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/motoring/9197930/Eating-while-driving-more-dangerous-than-using-phone.html>

15. *Beth Braccio Hering, CareerBuilder.com*, <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/LIVING/01/31/cb.lunch.break/index.html>

16. *Academy of Management Review*, 2012

17. *Happiness at Work survey*, Nic Marks, nef (new economics foundation, London) 2012

Legal and Union Aspects

Lunch breaks are a legal requirement in the European Union¹⁸. Although many countries around the world have laws governing working time and enforcing lunch breaks, others do not. In the United States there are no federal laws that enforce lunch breaks but several states do have legislation to that effect. The implications of poor lunch break management can be more complicated than simply ignoring the law. They can have severe repercussions on industrial relations as well as have a direct bearing on safety. The cost to a company for ignoring the ramifications can be both financial as well as reputational.

The European Working Time Directive instructs member states about minimum breaks in a working day. In the UK, workers are entitled to a rest break of 20 minutes after working six hours or more.

In 2004 the European Commission took the UK government to court for failing to enforce a directive that entitles employees to breaks after complaints by Amicus - the UK's largest manufacturing, technical and skilled persons' union to the EC¹⁹.

In California, a power solutions provider with a large field service workforce, paid out US \$980,000 when employees brought a class-action suit on meal and break²⁰ violations. The company was criticized for not having computerized records to show exactly when employees took lunch breaks.

In 2013, a 40-day strike at the of Hong Kong port cost the company and the Hong Kong government some US \$13 million. It ended when workers terms and conditions were met, including a lunch break for crane operators²¹.

In addition, countries are cracking down on dangerous driving habits and distracted driving and can issue fines that can add up to quite an expense. In the UK, a new citation worth three penalty points and a £90 fine will also be introduced for a number of careless driving offences, including eating a sandwich while driving.

Companies need to consider not just the legal

implications of lunch break policies, but also the issue of employee job satisfaction. Over-worked, stressed and unfit personnel affect corporate productivity and unhappy staff can be uncooperative, turn hostile and act in a manner that is detrimental to the company's interests.

How to ensure a good break

It's clear that you need a lunch break. The question is, how do you do lunch the right way? One of the keys to a "palatable" lunch for both employers and employees is making sure the scheduling of the lunch break is efficient and timely. This is especially critical when it comes to field workers. The dynamic changes in demands and work schedules together with the lack of visibility between office and field make this very difficult to manage in an optimal manner. Too much scheduling rigidity will cause time waste and worker discontent – too much leeway can result in a lax environment and another huge time waste.

To overcome the various and variable considerations of planning lunch breaks, a number of criteria need to be considered;

First and foremost, visibility: The ability to view planned lunch breaks on a scheduling board, as well as providing relevant input to the field employees. This visibility provides dispatchers with a better sense of control over daily schedules and provides field employees with the assurance that they will get their break when they need it.

Once visibility is achieved, the next stage in reaching scheduling optimization is the ability to reschedule breaks flexibly in order to balance benefits with operational efficiency. This allows for the insertion of emergency tasks, or options to better schedule time.

Companies tend to schedule lunch breaks in one of three ways: random timing, fixed timing and flexible timing. [also referred to as variable, fixed, and dynamic.]

Random timing: Not scheduling lunch breaks means that when workers do stop to eat, they deviate from the schedule causing subsequent jobs to be delayed,

18. <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/areas/industrialrelations/dictionary/definitions/RESTPERIODS.htm>

19. UK in dock over 'tea break' law, 2004, BBC, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/3539843.stm>

20. Ramona Fierro, Cloud-Hosted, Mobile Solution To Manage Field Workforce, Management Business Technology <http://www.mbtmag.com/articles/2013/04/cloud-hosted-mobile-solution-manage-field-workforce>

21. Simon Lee, Hong Kong April Port Volume Fell 12% as Strike Diverted Traffic, Bloomberg: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-05-16/hong-kong-april-port-volume-fell-12-as-strike-diverted-traffic.html>

customer dissatisfaction, increased overtime costs and compromised SLA's (service-level agreements).

Fixed timing: Many companies set a fixed time for a lunch break. This does not optimize team schedules and compromises overall efficiency. For example, a company whose employees are meant to break between 12 and 1 pm causes the scheduling to work around the break. An hour-long job planned for 11:15 am will be automatically rejected leaving a gap since it infringes on the fixed break time.

Flexible timing: In planning terms, the dynamic lunch break is the most suitable for mobile workforce management. The lunch break can be automatically scheduled at the beginning of the day, but can be rescheduled as daily events unfold. This not only ensures better time optimization but gives the staff the opportunity to decide when it might be most suitable to take a break, increasing employee participation and job satisfaction.

A recommended menu

In order to maintain peak efficiency and comply with rules and regulations, companies with field service personnel need an automated management solution that can fully integrate with mobile devices. This solution needs to be flexible and robust enough so that it can contend seamlessly with all the changes that are part of a typical day.

The solution needs to have real-time two-way communication between the office and the field so as to enable field employees to report task status as well as lunch break start and finish times. This information provides clear visibility to dispatchers and managers - an actual, overall picture of task completion.

The solution needs to be able to support flexible timing scheduling on the fly so as to take advantage of situations in the field in an optimal way.

So, while there is no such thing as a free lunch - having the right mobile workforce solution managing your lunch breaks can make them significantly more productive and cost effective!



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