

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, or the High Holy Days, are often regarded as the most important of all Jewish holidays. They are observed in the fall season during the month of Tishrei, the first month of the Jewish calendar. Rosh Hashanah, is the Jewish New Year and begins a ten-day period known as the Yamim Nora'im ("Days of Awe" in Hebrew), a time of reflection, repentance and renewal. Traditionally, no work is permitted during Rosh Hashanah as it is a day the Bible calls "Holy Convocation." The ten-day period ends with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement—a day set aside to atone for the sins of the past year. In addition to the prohibition of work during Yom Kippur, fasting is traditionally practiced and the day is spent in prayer and meditation in the synagogue.

Rosh Hashanah

Unlike Christmas, which always falls on December 25, or the secular New Year's Day on January 1, Rosh Hashanah falls at a slightly different time each year. Managers should be alert and check its dates. In 2017, Rosh Hashanah will begin at sundown on September 20 and end at sundown on September 22. There is a range of ways that Jewish employees may observe and celebrate the holiday. Some may request two days off, while others may take a half day off to attend synagogue services and others may ask to leave early to attend a holiday dinner. Recognizing that each employee has a distinctive set of beliefs and traditions is the key to effectively managing time off requests. Invite your employees to share how they observe Rosh Hashanah and what practices should be respected. "Happy New Year" or "*Shana Tova*" ("Good New Year," in Hebrew), can be used to greet your colleagues and friends appropriately during Rosh Hashanah. You may also wish your colleagues "a sweet New Year."

Yom Kippur

As noted, Yom Kippur always falls ten days after the start of Rosh Hashanah. In 2017, Yom Kippur will begin at sundown on September 29 and continue until sundown on September 30. Yom Kippur is viewed by many Jews as the most holy of the Jewish sacred times. Jewish employees may request time off to observe Yom Kippur. It is important to be flexible and meet their needs. "Easy Fast" or "*Tzom Kal*" in Hebrew, can be used to greet your colleagues and friends appropriately during Yom Kippur.

Fasting

In observance of Yom Kippur, Jews will traditionally fast for a full day. The fast begins at sundown, usually after a large holiday meal. During the fast, neither food nor drink is consumed. The time when the fast ends is usually referred to as the break-fast. This year, it will occur at sundown on October 12. It is likely that a Jewish employee will request to take the day off in observance of Yom Kippur. However, if a Jewish employee is fasting in observance of Yom Kippur but has willingly agreed to work, it is important for employers to be aware of the employee's need for a break to end the fast after sunset.

Scheduling

In general, it's important for companies to take Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur into account when scheduling conference calls, meetings, or luncheons. To avoid scheduling conflicts, a better practice is for companies to ensure that the holiday dates are circulated in advance, or automatically programmed into online meeting tools.

It is also important to keep in mind that other significant Jewish holidays are observed in the two weeks following Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Sukkot, which always begins the fifth day after Yom Kippur, is a seven-day festival commemorating the 40-year period in which the Jews wandered in the desert after leaving Egypt and before arriving in Israel. The holiday is also a harvest festival. Traditionally, as is the case with Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, no work is permitted on the first two days of Sukkot, and some Jews may take these days off of work. Sukkot is followed immediately by two additional holidays, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, although in Israel these two holidays are celebrated in one day. Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah are also holidays in which many Jews are traditionally not permitted to work, and some Jewish employees may request these days off. Since these holidays come so soon after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is important to take into account that some employees may request multiple days off in a short period of time, and to work with such employees to find ways of accommodating these requests.

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