

Title:

Yes, You Too Can Take A Vacation

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Summary:

Surveys are interesting. I took note of this one done recently by American Express because it backed up some data I learned at the (National Association of Female Executives) NAFE National Conference in May. According to the survey, 40% of the smallest business owners - those with less than \$200,000 in annual revenues - are planning no vacation whatsoever this summer. But even business owners with higher revenues aren't doing much better - only 75% of them expect to get away ...

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Article Body:

Surveys are interesting. I took note of this one done recently by American Express because it backed up some data I learned at the (National Association of Female Executives) NAFE National Conference in May. According to the survey, 40% of the smallest business owners - those with less than \$200,000 in annual revenues - are planning no vacation whatsoever this summer. But even business owners with higher revenues aren't doing much better - only 75% of them expect to get away from the business this summer.

As we were told at the NAFE Conference, even those business owners who do get away from the office, won't truly get away. Rather, one in three will link their vacation time to a business trip and 50% will still check in with the office at least once a day.

Why can't business owners let go? What are the concerns that keep them tied to the business? According to the survey:

- * An important client or customer will not receive appropriate service
- * The business will miss out on a new opportunity
- * There is no other competent person to leave in charge
- * The individuals left in charge will make the wrong decisions
- * An operational or equipment breakdown will occur without anyone to solve the problem

Such concerns are not surprising. It is hard for a business owner to take any type of vacation worry-free. But with planning, preparation and good leadership you can boost the enjoyment level of your time off to come back refreshed and ready to tackle new challenges and opportunities. Here are 8 steps to prevent vacation angst.

1. Make a plan - To avoid surprises, create a list of scenarios on your current projects and brief your staff on the possibilities and your major concerns about each client. Assign specific staff to each client/account so there is someone that clients can speak to who understands their concerns when you aren't there.

2. Brief your key clients or customers - Offer them advance notice of any extended absence you are planning. There's no reason to keep your vacation schedule a secret. Introduce them to your deputy and convey your confidence in their ability to handle any issues that may arise. If appropriate, consider letting them know how to reach you should a true emergency arise - not that one will because of all your pre-planning.

3. Leadership is being a delegator not a dictator - If you never delegate important tasks to others, you can't expect them to be ready to fill your shoes when you want to take time off. To create a saner situation and build confidence that good things will happen when you aren't there, learn to delegate responsibilities - divvy up those pieces that must still happen in your absence and postpone those that can wait for your return.

4. Strategically schedule your vacation time - Most businesses have a slow season or times of the year when the pace is slower, or at least a bit less crazy. Plan your vacations to coincide with those lulls.

5. Mini-Vacations - If you just can't let go of the business for a whole week or two, or you can't bear to be too far away from the office, try taking a few days out of town, or extend a weekend somewhere else. Even a brief escape from routine with a change of scenery can do wonders for your perspective and re-energize you.

6. Disconnect entirely - When you do take a vacation: turn off your cell phone, don't bring the laptop, don't check your email, don't bring work with you and avoid the temptation to call or visit the office to "check up" on what's happening. If there's an emergency they can't handle, they will find you.

7. Take time off to sharpen skills - If you just can't justify taking time off to kick back and relax, then take time off to learn something new - business or

personal. Taking continuing education courses at a local college or business school is a low-cost and effective way to break from your office routine, be with new people and try new things. Some programs are 3-5 days off-site if that fits your schedule better.

8. Keep your priorities straight - When you go through the exercise of listing the things you really care about, is your business really #1, 2, and 3? Outside of work, your priorities might be connecting with family and friends, spending time with kids, cultivating personal interests, staying healthy or pursuing an avocation. To regain balance in your life, you need to keep work, family and personal time in perspective. Those other priorities help you find more enjoyment in your time away from the business.

Let me know if these tips help you take a well-deserved vacation (or two) this summer.