



Dear Friend,

Vacation Days

There's a commercial that's begun running recently. At first, it made me laugh; then, it left me shaking my head.

The commercial is about vacation days.

Picture...

person after person,

in scene after scene,

dressed in a bright yellow T-shirt inscribed with the words "Vacation Day" and

without much joy, describing how they were used.

"I was used to move my sister."

"I was used to wait for the plumber."

"I was used to clean the gutters."

I don't know about you, but none of these is my idea of a fun way to use a precious, and hard-earned, vacation day. (Apparently, that's exactly what the folks behind the commercial want us to feel. Their goal is to get us all to visit them on vacation!)

Anyway, this commercial got me thinking. How often do we take vacation, actually set out to *enjoy* it, and then end up not moving a sibling, waiting for the plumber, or cleaning gutters, but doing WORK...*from* WORK? We go on vacation, but then we turn around and do the very work from which we are supposed to be taking a break! I must admit that I've been guilty at times. How about you?

Well, as we enter the peak vacation season, we devote this month's edition of **EA Insights** to the topic of vacations. Want to enjoy yours a bit better? Read on!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

4 Keys to a Worry-Free Vacation

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

It never ceases to amaze me how often people call in, respond to emails, or even show up at the office when they're supposed to be...**on vacation**.

Somewhere along the line, we've lost the sense of what *time off* really means.

Although I'm not sure where we strayed, I can tell you this. Taking time off, but working through it, renders us punchy, resentful, not refreshed, and less productive than we should be as we "return" to the work that, in all honesty, we truly never left. And, we, as well as our workplaces, pay the cost.

So, are you looking ahead to your vacation? Let me offer four keys to help you enjoy a vacation that actually enables you to take a break from work.

Key #1: Time it right.

Let's be honest. If you set your vacation for *THE* most hectic time of your office's year, expect (if you get to go at all) that your time will be interrupted...probably often.

Timing is a critical factor in your ability to appreciate your vacation. As you'll see with each point below, enjoyment increases as the impact of your absence decreases. Removing yourself from the equation of your workplace, at the time when the folks there need you most, isn't a wise move. So, as you settle on a vacation period, be sure to think about the normal flow of work; think about special, upcoming events; and schedule your vacation days to have as little an effect as possible on such busy times.

Key #2: Be organized.

Most work never comes to a complete stop. Something always is going on. So, even with the best timing, there's work to be done while you're away. That's where *organization* comes in.

As you're looking ahead to vacation, think about the typical events or tasks that must occur in your absence. Touch base with the people with whom you work most frequently, and find out if there are special needs



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"Quotes"

"Schedule your vacation around the schedule of your business. For instance, if you work in accounting, don't plan on vacationing in March."
~Robin Bond

"The ant is knowing and wise, but he doesn't know enough to take a vacation."
~Clarence Day

"If you're buying a complete vacation for 2,000 or 3,000 dollars, it's an investment you want to protect."
~Pauline Frommer

"What do I want to take home from my summer vacation time? The wonderful luxury of being at rest. The days when you shut down the mental machinery that keeps life on track and let life simply wander. The days when you stop planning, analyzing, thinking and just are. Summer is my period of grace."
~Ellen Goodman

*"In the position of president it has been impossible to take any substantial vacation. *** And I'm tired."*
~Katherine Henderson

"If some people didn't tell you, you'd never know they'd been away on a vacation."
~Kin Hubbard

"A vacation is having nothing to do and all day to do it in."
~Robert Orben

"People will pay for groceries and their car bill, but they'll skip vacation if necessary."
~Mark Reed

"That was a heck of a time to go on vacation."

~Mark Shapiro

"American workers receive the least amount of vacation days (12 on average) among all the countries that we surveyed. Yet we still, unbelievably, don't use up all of our days, with each American worker estimated to give back an average of 3 vacation days [this year]."

~Kari Swartz

"Vacation used to be a luxury; however, in today's world, it has become a necessity."

~Unknown

"A vacation should be just long enough that you're boss misses you, and not long enough for him to discover how well he can get along without you."

~Unknown

"It's important to learn what works for you so at the end of the vacation you really do feel like you had a break from your work."

~Mark Walker

"The link between stress and vacation levels is interesting. Do the results mean that executives who take longer vacations feel less stressed, or is it that the less stressed they feel, the more vacation they are able to take?"

~Peter Walker

"Two years ago, I had to make the call to my wife explaining that our two-week vacation was canceled.... It's not always easy -- everyone has plans and things they want to do."

~Pat Walsh

"A vacation is what you take when you can no longer take what you've been taking."

~Earl Wilson

"On vacation, I totally unplug. I don't bring a laptop with me."

~Will Wright

they'll have during your vacation period. Then, organize things for your absence. Prepare a list of those "while I'm away" matters, with due dates and instructions, that's ready before you leave. If it's possible, complete as many of the tasks (or portions of them) as you can ahead of time. That way, they're done, and they only have to be submitted or have finishing touches added at the appointed time.

We all know that life can get crazy right before vacation. So also pause to organize your work space before you head out the door. Place files or items that people will need in easily identifiable areas. Label things. Clear your desk, or replace your tools. Do what you can do to enable people to find things they might need while you're away. If you can do *that* for them, you stand a better chance of not getting a panicked communication while you're in mid-enjoyment mode because some necessary item can't be found back at work.

Additionally, don't forget to set expectations. Activate your email and phone out-of-office notifications for people seeking to communicate with you during the period. Let them know the frequency with which you'll be checking messages (if at all). Tell them whom to contact in your absence. Give them a time frame for your response once you return. Your goal is to let people know what to expect, and to have comfort that you have made provisions to handle matters they need addressed, while you're away.

Key #3: Prepare the folks you leave behind.

I'm a big proponent of cross-training anyway, but the need to build in redundancies expands at vacation time.

Don't fall into the trap of needing to be needed to the point that you can't give yourself the mental and physical break you need to be the person the folks at work both need and want to be around. (*Did you follow that?*) Seriously, vacations have been instituted because we're not machines; we need a break! To give yourself *your* needed break, prepare the folks who'll remain in place while you're away.

So, again, here's where organization comes into play. Don't wait until the day you're trying to dart out of the door to try to cram all of your knowledge into someone else's head. Begin in the weeks leading up to your time away. Coordinate with your supervisor so that he or she can assist you in making the right hand-offs of vacation-period tasks and so that he or she can be poised to support your stand-ins with their assignments in your absence.

Ensure that your go-to person or people are actually going to be at work during this time. (Yes, there are folks who have been known to assign duties to people who *also* have vacation planned for the period in question! Not good.) Refer to that list of tasks you assembled as you organized for the period, and walk your stand-in(s) through the duties to be assumed. Give them the parameters so that they know what needs to be followed to the letter and where they've got flexibility; and let them know that you trust them to fill in for you and appreciate what they will do. Be sure that someone knows where to find important items in your work space or on your computer; similarly, be sure that someone knows whom to contact for what regarding the tasks you're assigning. Answering questions and bolstering the comfort levels of the folks who remain in place *on the front end* can buy you uninterrupted days of rest *on the back end*.

Key #4: Devise an approach for true emergencies.

No plan is perfect; there are times when the unexpected occurs. The problem is that sometimes people don't know what constitutes a *true* emergency. So what happens? They call you for every little thing (*and drive you crazy*), or they don't call you when they really should (*and drive you crazy when you find out*).

How do you cope?

First, define *true emergencies* with your stand-in(s). As you've planned for vacation, you've mapped out typical occurrences for the period. However, also think worst-case scenario. And, don't hide this stuff from your stand-in(s); it just might happen. Be up front about what could occur so that you can prepare folks properly.

Second, run through the types of decisions or situations that people can tackle on their own, if they arise in your absence, versus those that require involvement. Again, though, that involvement need not be *yours*. Facilitate communication between your stand-in(s) and your supervisor so that the one who's in place, and in authority, can provide them with real-time assistance in the case of emergencies.

Third, arm the folks to handle the emergencies. Walk your stand-in(s) through a couple of quirky scenarios so that they can feel a level of comfort going off-script, making decisions, handling unusual situations, communicating with the right folks...without you, if necessary.

Finally, ensure that *someone* knows how to reach you in the event that your input really is required. You probably don't want to entrust this information to everyone, as not everyone will help you protect your treasured vacation time. However, leave the details with your supervisor, an administrator, and/or a trusted colleague -- someone who can reach out to you...*if* truly necessary.

For those of you preparing for vacation, on behalf of Executive Advantage, I wish you an enjoyable and restful time away. Come back recharged and ready to dive into the critical work that lies ahead!

Also, if you're finding that planning (for yourself and/or for your team or organization) is an area in which you could use some support, don't go it alone. Contact us today to explore how **Executive Advantage** can partner with you to help you **A-C-E** your **business** or **professional** challenges.

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At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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