



Workforce Benefits Excellence

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Navigating Career Breaks:

Understanding the Difference Between
a Work Career Hiatus and Sabbatical

In professional life, the idea of taking a break from one's career has gained increasing acceptance and recognition. However, it's essential to distinguish between two commonly misunderstood terms: a work career hiatus and a sabbatical.

My personal experience took me on both journeys. I had thought to take a hiatus after thirty-five years, mainly for delayed hip replacement surgery (hurrah – it went amazingly well) and to stem burnout. I also chose to leave my current employer to follow a career path better aligned with my experience and expertise. While I have had opportunities to return to full-time work after a brief hiatus, unexpected events sidelined my plans, taking me down a path to a true sabbatical.

In addition to a longer-than-expected healing period, I also experienced the loss of my mother and the birth of our newest grandson. Death and birth are major life events. So is choosing a new career partner. These life events gave me a different perspective and challenged me to rethink whether I needed a hiatus or a sabbatical.

What, you ask, is the difference? Imagine the former is like a button you press to put your career on pause while you have a short-term event – such as surgery – and the latter is a pause you take to evaluate your life and career and what you want to do and with whom,

while also taking time to learn more about yourself, your profession, and the professionals with whom you might work.

While both involve stepping away from work for a period, they differ significantly in purpose, structure, and benefits. Understanding these disparities can empower individuals to make informed career paths and personal growth decisions. Let's delve into the distinctions and the benefits each offers.

Work Career Hiatus:

A work career hiatus typically refers to an extended period away from work for personal reasons, such as caregiving responsibilities, health issues, or pursuing personal interests. Unlike a sabbatical, which often involves planning and employer support, a hiatus may occur unexpectedly without formal arrangements.

Benefits of a Work Career Hiatus:

1. **Renewed Perspective:** Stepping away from the routine of work can provide a fresh outlook on life and career goals. It allows individuals to reevaluate their priorities and make necessary adjustments.
2. **Personal Development:** During a hiatus, individuals often can focus on personal growth, whether through education, travel, or pursuing hobbies. This time away can lead to enhanced skills and self-awareness.
3. **Family and Health:** Taking a hiatus can enable individuals to prioritize their well-being and family commitments. It offers the flexibility to address personal challenges or spend quality time with loved ones.
4. **Work-life balance:** By temporarily disconnecting from work, individuals can better balance their professional and personal lives, reducing burnout and stress.

Sabbatical:

A sabbatical is a planned period of leave usually granted by an employer, typically after a certain number of years of service. Unlike a hiatus, a sabbatical is formalized and often comes with specific terms and conditions agreed upon by both the employee and the employer. In the UK, sabbaticals are often offered either paid or unpaid.

Benefits of a Sabbatical:

1. **Professional Development:** Sabbaticals are often used for skill enhancement, research, or pursuing educational opportunities relevant to one's career. It allows individuals to return to work with updated knowledge and expertise.
2. **Career Advancement:** Employers increasingly view sabbaticals as valuable experiences that contribute to employee retention and satisfaction. A sabbatical can demonstrate commitment to personal growth and development, enhancing one's professional reputation.

3. **Workplace Morale:** Offering sabbaticals can boost morale and productivity within an organization. Employees feel supported and valued, leading to increased loyalty and engagement.
4. **Rejuvenation:** Like a hiatus, a sabbatical provides an opportunity for rest and rejuvenation. It allows individuals to recharge mentally and physically, returning to work with renewed energy and enthusiasm.

My personal sabbatical has enabled me to examine the professional landscape and build relationships with those with whom I might have the opportunity to work in the future. This has also allowed those with opportunities to know me better and evaluate my value in the potential partnership. This, after all, is a marriage for the long term, or so you hope.

It has also given me time to research our industry for fresh and new ideas, perspectives, and solutions and to spend the time necessary to evaluate product and service solutions in the context of the advice I provide to clients. Finding time to do research on a busy workday is very difficult. I have also found time to finish business articles that have been collecting dust. A sabbatical is a perfect opportunity to enrich one's knowledge and further develop your talent while preventing or recovering from burnout.

Conclusion:

In summary, while a work career hiatus and a sabbatical involve taking time away, they serve different purposes and offer distinct benefits. Personal reasons often drive a hiatus and allow individuals to address life challenges or pursue personal interests. On the other hand, a sabbatical, as a leave granted or not by an employer, often provides a longer pause to return to one's career with a clearer focus on what is most important and direction for a more fulfilling life and career.

Taking a leave does not detract from or diminish one's value and talent. I urge anyone who has the means to make it happen to make this a goal. Call it whichever seems most appropriate, but a hiatus or sabbatical is the perfect opportunity for rest, recovery, renewal, personal growth, and recharging your batteries – no fossil fuels needed.

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