

How to vacation without falling behind at work

Tips to avoid the 'I need a vacation from my vacation' syndrome.

By Jennifer Myers



Everyone can appreciate the value of a well-earned vacation — getting away and spending time with loved ones brings refreshment and rejuvenation, deepens your connections and makes you happier overall. So why do so many Americans leave vacation days unused at the end of each year?

Stepping away from your work can seem nearly impossible, but even worse is the feeling of returning from a much-needed vacation only to find yourself buried and behind. Instead of feeling refreshed, you come back anxious and overwhelmed. How can you vacation responsibly without falling behind at

work? Here are a few tips.

Prepare Well in Advance

No matter your position in an organization, it's best to schedule your vacation well in advance — four to six months is generous — and to travel at a time when you're least needed. If there is a seasonal lull in your

industry, plan to get away then. Colleagues appreciate communication, so when you work to coordinate with your colleagues' vacation plans, the overall attitude toward your stepping away will likely be more positive.

Over-Deliver Before You Leave

The outcome you desire is twofold: the ability to leave for vacation without worrying that you forgot something, and the ability to return from your vacation without feeling regret and overwhelm. The secret is to leave as few things outstanding or in progress as you can. Where possible, finish projects that involve only you. For ongoing projects that might not be able to wait for your return, delegate. Leave notes regarding each project's current status along with key contact information for whomever will be assisting while you're away. The more organized, thorough and clear you can be in your instructions, the more indispensable you'll appear.

If you're in customer service, then you must absolutely over-deliver for your customers. One surefire way to come back to chaos is to leave your customers with unanswered questions or confusion. Make sure you've communicated the dates of

your travel clearly to your customers in advance, along with contact information should they need assistance before your return. Don't let them accidentally discover your absence for the first time as they hear your voice-mail recording or read your out-of-office email autoreply. Give them the courtesy of advance awareness, offering to deal with any pressing issues, and that thoughtfulness will keep most customers content while you're enjoying some much-needed respite.

Clean Your Desk

Though you might feel frenzied just before your vacation, do not leave your desk or workspace in chaos. File any stray papers, empty your garbage and clear away any piles. It will make your transition back into the office smoother.

Ditch the Phone

Despite the magnetic attraction your phone and email might have while sipping an umbrella drink from a lounge chair, resist. When you've worked hard to prepare for your vacation well in advance, over-delivered in your performance and left behind order, you have positioned yourself to relax and enjoy your time away without worry. ■

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