

## **Juggling Summer Vacation with Priorities** **By Sherry Borsheim**

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Is there anything more powerful than the lure of getting out of the office for summer vacation to spend quality time with family or to just relax and recharge? Unfortunately, there is. Too often, stresses from work hold us captive over summer vacation.

There's the concern that taking any vacation time will result in a loss of momentum at the office, or that the stress of coming back to an impossibly large to-do list isn't worth the down time.

In fact, over half of the executives surveyed in a Management Recruiters International (MRI) survey were not planning to use their full vacations this year due to increased workloads. A whopping thirty three per cent of those that do manage to take a vacation keep their cell phone handy to stay in contact with work (Travelocity), while a full 30 per cent of employees do office work while on vacation (Mother Jones magazine).

While these tactics may seem to be the only solution for the overworked, it's a sure-fire way to ruin a vacation. Not only is it impossible to relax or enjoy quality family time, but also it's unrealistic to expect to de-stress and recharge while away.

In North America, we are pressured to work 24/7 without any down time. Although this may seem industrious, it has the exact opposite affect on our productivity levels at work, not to mention disastrous physical consequences.

At work, stress related productivity loss and other stress related expenses cause American businesses to lose an estimated \$200 - \$300 billion dollars per year!

In terms of physical health, the American Institute of Stress in Yonkers, New York, estimates that 90 percent of all visits to doctors are for stress-related disorders. Over stressed individuals face health risks and may develop a variety of ills. To name just a few, high blood pressure, nervous breakdowns, headaches, chest pains, insomnia, fatigue, depressive episodes and weakened immune systems have all been connected with stress.

The bottom line is that everyone needs down time to rest, rejuvenate and recharge. Fortunately, it is possible to take a relaxing vacation that includes a relatively easy transition back to work. It's all a matter of being organized.

To avoid coming back to a full voice mailbox or an overloaded e-mail inbox, create a vacation work plan. Start by letting team members or co-workers know what projects you're working on and what may need to happen while you are away - plan who can cover your responsibilities.

To truly enjoy your vacation time, leave everything work related behind. That includes cell phones, Blackberry's, laptops and the compulsion to constantly check e-mail. With that in mind, create an "Out of Office" replay on your work phone, cell, Blackberry and e-mail. Instead of encouraging callers to leave messages or items for your to-do list, suggest that they contact another responsible party while you are away. Remember to leave a contact's name and number for this situation and be sure to return the favour when your co-worker goes on vacation.

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To take it one step at a time, use this short checklist for creating your vacation work plan:

- Let co-workers know the status of your projects.
- Work around issues that need to be dealt with before you leave.
- Make sure you have responsible people to cover for you while you're away. They will need to process your projects, phone calls, voice mails and possibly e-mail. If you have multiple projects on the go, determine who will handle each project while you are away.
- Delegate if you can. To keep delegated duties clear and organized, use [Simply Productive's Delegation Check List](#).
- Organize your desk and projects so that people will be able to easily find what they need while you are gone. Be sure to share your system of organization with others before you leave. ([Click here](#) to download Simply Productive's Top 10 Office Organizing Tips)
- Plan for a transition day upon your return.

As much as you need to be disconnected from work during your vacation, it is important to be available in case of an emergency. In planning for such an event, leave your contact information with gatekeeper, family member or friend who can contact you in case of a real emergency. That way you won't need to check in with the office while you're away.

After your well-deserved vacation, take a day to transition back to work. This is an essential part of relieving post-vacation stress. This first day back will mostly consist of checking e-mails and voice mails and re-connecting with co-workers on the status of your projects.

Take time during this day to prioritize projects. Remember not to become overwhelmed by the small stuff, but rather, look at the big picture of what needs to be accomplished and go from there.

In addition to creating a vacation work plan, don't forget to effectively plan your actual vacation time. Create a checklist for leaving and returning from vacation. Be sure to create a [packing checklist](#) along with a checklist for home items that need to be taken care of before you go away (go to [www.simplyproductive.com](http://www.simplyproductive.com) and sign up for our newsletter and you'll receive a free packing checklist).

If taking a week or two of vacation time all at once isn't possible, consider extending long weekends for mini-vacations by taking time off the day before and after long weekends. This way you'll only miss two to three days of actual work time, instead of a week at a time. Usually the days right before and after a long weekend aren't highly productive, so you'll miss even less than expected.

Remember, to truly succeed in business and in life, it's essential to practice good self-care. Make sure you take some time off this summer to relax and recharge. Not only will your body thank you, but also your workplace will be pleased as your productivity levels soar.

*Sherry Borsheim is the president of Simply Productive and has been helping companies and individuals jumpstart their productivity for years. People improve their ability to focus, organize, and prioritize while reducing the stress and overwhelm in the workplace. We are a team of experts who specialize in resolving paper, space, time, and email management issues.*

*Sherry's just released book "Conquer Chaos, fast forward to office efficiency" is a how-to book on getting organized and a step-by-step process that helps people organize their lives and their office space for increased business success. Buy a copy today at [www.simplyproductive.com](http://www.simplyproductive.com). Contact Simply Productive for more information about our products and services 604-233-7076 or email us at [info@simplyproductive.com](mailto:info@simplyproductive.com).*

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