

Evaluating Vacation

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Vacations can cure burnout, but research indicates it takes 2 weeks for that to happen

This year's vacation was better than expected. Given how some of my peers are doing, I'm just glad I could afford to get some time off. But I still had to take calls while I was away, and handle problems that the office could have taken care of. What should I do, so that next year I can truly be away.

Expecting the business to run without you is always a good goal. It means that at least some of the time you're no longer the tent pole, with the business sitting squarely on your shoulders. As a result, the business is stronger, safer, and more valuable.

Taking a vacation is a good way to test the readiness of the business to run without you. And it's a good first step towards preparing the business to be saleable - even if that might be years down the road. Think of it this way. Who wants to pay you money for a business that can't run without you. Instead, test the readiness of the business to operate without you, by getting away to do something else, as you recharge your batteries in the process.

Now that you're back from vacation it's time to take stock of how things went. What calls did you take? What was on your desk when you got back? What should've happened but didn't while you were away? What are your goals for your next vacation?

Start by making a list of everything that you handled while away, as well as things that waited for your return. Focus here, as you start to prepare for your next vacation and even more independence from the business. Decide who should handle items next time, and lay out a training program for them to take over. Try not to hold back anything.

Here are some questions you can ask, to get your freedom-from-the-business plan started. What calls and issues were referred to me, and why? Who else could have taken the calls? What additional information would they have needed to handle the calls? What decision making authority needs to be delegated in order to deal with those calls? Is there someone who needs training to be my backup in one or more areas? What is the training plan to get people up to speed?

Check what's on your desk. Everything from opening mail, to writing checks, placing orders, confirming client proposals, approving payroll, and doing reviews, may be waiting for you to check back in. Ask yourself, what's it doing on my desk?

The third area to consider is a little less obvious. What should or could have happened, but didn't, while you were away? What plans, development work, longer term commitments, etc. got put on hold pending your return?

Think about setting up teams to handle the bigger items. Balance out decision making by having a group of people be responsible. Insure that projects with more complex implementation needs don't get hung up, by having 2 or 3 key players assigned to oversee progress.

Finally, think about your goals for your next vacation. Try to get away again in another quarter. Even if you stay home, stay away from the business. Let it run without you. Plan to take fewer, or no calls. Expect your desk to be clear when you get back. Seek to have projects and plans humming along, regardless of whether you're around or absent.

Keep in mind that most businesses rely on their owners. And no matter how much owners complain about that, they also set it up that way. They like being important, central to decisions, in control of what's going on. But if owners are to achieve a valuable end goal of having a sale-able business, they have to remove themselves. The next owner wants a business that can run itself. So build the business to run without you now and enjoy the time off!

Looking for a good book? Don't Miss Your Life: Find More Joy and Fulfillment Now, by Joe Robinson.

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