Taking your work with you on vacation

Vacations are a precious opportunity to relieve stress, spend quality time with family and friends, and experience different cultures and lifestyles. The benefits of vacations are considerably diminished, however, when work follows you from the office to the airplane or campsite. The reality is that many vacations can quickly become an extension of work: the guided tour becomes a conference call, the beach day gets swallowed up by answering emails, and dinner is postponed to complete a proposal. While you might not be able to completely leave work at home, there are ways to reduce its presence so that you can better enjoy your vacation.

Vacation preparation

Coordinating a vacation requires some due diligence. Make sure that everyone knows when you will be taking your vacation and how long you plan to be away. If you do not communicate your time off clearly to your manager and colleagues, they may assume that you will be in the workplace and assign you work accordingly.

- **Send an email within the department one month before leaving.** Although you probably have already confirmed with your manager and HR that it is okay to take those days off, send an email to notify your co-workers and remind any other necessary staff members that you will be on vacation. This gives your co-workers enough time to make the necessary adjustments to project timelines, especially if you are part of an on-going project. It also reduces the risk of a managerial oversight during a time that you will be away.
- **Last-minute checks.** In the week prior to leaving, check again with your co-workers to see what is needed from you. Is there anything that you would need to complete before leaving, or can it be postponed until after you get back? Confirm if there are any conference calls that you need to attend or if you can either get the notes from a colleague, or if the call can be rescheduled for when you return.

Emails on the beach

Work, like life, is unpredictable, and in spite of your best efforts to enjoy a work-free vacation, something may come up that requires your attention. In that case, use your time effectively so that work does not take over your entire vacation. Here are some helpful tips to consider:

- **Alleviate smartphone anxiety.** We are all familiar with the experience of an engaging conversation getting interrupted by the buzz of a new email. Even if you resist the impulse to check your phone, knowing that there is a new email waiting for you may cause anxiety and ultimately be a source of distraction. If you feel guilty about checking your email when you are with your family or friends, then leave your phone in the hotel room, and only use it during down-times, like waiting for a dinner reservation.
- **Mitigate media multi-tasking.** Understandably, you might try to accomplish as much as you can within a short amount of time while on vacation. As a result, you might try to listen to voicemail while sending an email, or edit a draft while listening in on a conference call. Ultimately, **media multi-tasking is an ineffective use of your time**. Completing tasks one by one will provide you with a sense of accomplishment, while having several partially finished tasks has been proven to raise stress levels.
- **Prioritise your vacation.** According to surveys, people feel relaxed and rejuvenated when they get home from a vacation. They are also reported being more focused at work after a vacation. Therefore, if you get blindsided by work when you are sitting on the beach, remember that you have earned your vacation, and place your vacation as the higher priority. You – and your organisation – will be better off for it!

"We really feel the physical and mental benefits of even a brief getaway. Vacations can lower blood pressure and ease stress and tension in the body. They give us the time to reconnect with spouses, partners, family members and friends, and we return to work rejuvenated and better able to focus – and all of that translates into stronger feelings of well-being. Vacations are a prescription for health, stress relief, more energy, improved productivity and overall happiness."

- Stress specialist, Dr. David Posen

You might think that to always put your work before your personal well-being is the responsible thing to do. In reality, it is *not*. If you need to work during your vacation, manage it so that it takes a backseat to your much needed and well-deserved relaxation. Many of us love our jobs, and will gladly work during vacation, but a healthy **life requires balance.** It is important to recognise your limits and prevent **burnout**, so returning to work with your batteries recharged is actually the best thing you can do as an individual – *and* as an employee!