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# Be a Leader: Take a Vacation

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In a world of a minimum of 2,000 billable hours annually, taking a vacation may seem like a luxury, impossible or simply irresponsible. However, taking a vacation can not only lead to fresh perspectives and effectiveness at work and home, stress reduction and enhanced creativity, but can also build the fundamental leadership skills needed after the vacation ends.

Taking a vacation can feel like you are putting out your client and peers. It can raise internal doubts such as “I might not be indispensable”. It could even feel like you are fighting against the firm’s culture and peer pressure, since vacations are often informally discouraged.

Even if you are successful in getting away, there can be additional barriers. For example, there is the need to be accessible while away, the return to significant catch-up work, and the need to transition back to the fast pace of work again.

While all this may seem daunting, these issues, when managed successfully, can in fact build leadership skills that increase the work effectiveness needed for the 21st century.

Through conscious planning and management, taking a vacation could be seen as a badge of competence – proving you can lead effectively – as well as an opportunity to develop the skills that will benefit you throughout your career. Integrated leaders have management skills such as delegation, planning, prioritisation and

managing expectations (inside and outside of work). In addition, they understand that they cannot do it alone but instead work in partnership with others to meet their responsibilities, both at work and at home.

Failure to master these skills can result in burnout, lower productivity and reduced creativity for partners and those who they supervise.

## How to get away

1. *Plan ahead.* Think through what needs to be done during the vacation. For example, determine whether certain tasks can be frontloaded, delegated or postponed.
2. *Clarify and manage expectations.* Agree on the best process for making time-sensitive decisions and managing unexpected work responsibilities. Let everyone involved in your matters know your plan, including who is responsible while you’re gone and the importance you place on this time away.
3. *Anticipate and define emergencies.* Realise that emergencies can happen, so be flexible. Think ahead about challenges that could arise and plan out different scenarios for effectively addressing them. Also, set clear boundaries for yourself by defining what an emergency is so that all work doesn’t become an emergency.
4. *Manage communications.* Decide how you prefer to manage ongoing communication while you’re away by

setting up an out-of-office reminder with instructions on who to contact in an emergency and by checking emails at fixed intervals. Make an assistant aware of how you can be reached by phone in emergencies.

5. *Schedule in quiet days.* Avoid scheduling lots of meetings and calls a few days before you leave and after you return.

## Be a role model

It can be challenging for associates to plan and implement vacations, so it helps to have support from the supervising attorney. Partners are role models: when partners take vacations, they model both the value of taking time to recharge as well as core management skills.

Partners can also make recommendations of the best time to take vacations and systemically manage vacations based on expected workloads and practice areas. In particular, partners can help plan and coordinate associates’ vacations to minimise overlap and ensure sufficient coverage.

Partners can also proactively help to set expectations: they can help to define vacation email/call plans. They can work with clients to explain how vacations are valuable to their associates and won’t compromise cases.

Nevertheless, despite effective planning, a significant work conflict may still arise. Should this occur, partners can get the associate planning a vacation involved in

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deciding how best to handle the conflict. For example, a partner could give the associate the choice of whether to reschedule the vacation or work in a pre-agreed way during the vacation.

Finally, the firm's policies can encourage everyone to take a vacation. If policy – both formal and informal – is supported by action, it could shift the firm's culture to one that really supports vacations, including all of the associated benefits.

### Client benefits

Effectively and creatively managing work/life demands shows that one can more effectively manage clients and workload. Taking vacations can effectively demonstrate to both clients and the firm that an attorney has the necessary skills to lead a modern business. These are benefits that don't fade with the tan.

## Author Biographies



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