

LifeMapSM



"LifeMap is a navigational tool to help you on your path towards personal and professional success. Our belief is that you can achieve a more rewarding career, a more productive organization and a more enjoyable and abundant life."

July 15, 2008

This Week's Message:

Get Outta Town!

Paths Forward

Resources

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at your next meeting
or conference.**

Greetings!

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Get Outta Town!

Getting away from work for a vacation is a chance to break out of routine, to get away, to gain a different perspective, spend time with family and friends, to have some fun and recharge one's batteries. Yet Americans forfeit some 421 million unused vacation days a year which is the same thing as subsidizing their employers to the tune of somewhere between \$1.2 - \$1.93 billion a year. If this powerful statistic

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applies to you I hope you, at least, got a thank you note!

In reality this growing problem of unused vacation is no bonus for employers. Medical studies show that employees who leave vacation days on the table feel overworked, stressed and are more likely to develop heart disease costing millions in lost productivity and higher medical costs. Vacations are good for one's mental health and savvy employers know that focused, re-energized employees provide better customer service, are more creative, enthusiastic and often feel better about their jobs. In fact, a Department of Labor study showed that for every \$1.00 of vacation benefits employers provide they get \$3.00 worth of improved productivity and morale.

People who take vacations show higher levels of marital satisfaction and lower levels of depression. Vacations lower stress levels and we know that stress affects immune system function, cardiovascular health, emotional health and one's overall quality of life. So if it's good for you, your marriage, your family, and your employer why do about 25% of employees not take the vacation to which they are entitled?

If you are in this group (or if someone you live with is) here is what may be going on and what you can do about it.

Paths Forward

- **Exaggerated Self-Importance.**

"I can't take a vacation. My employees, (or team, board, customers, etc.) depend on me. This place would fall apart without me." Maybe you wouldn't actually say this out loud but I find there are a lot of people who really believe it. If you truly believe you are indispensable (and, c'mon, no one is really indispensable), then you need to plan well in advance for a potential vacation and how your responsibilities should be handled in your absence. Share your concern with your boss and involve a subordinate or colleague in some cross-training. If you are the boss start now in developing your team to expand their skills, if you are a business owner start now with some succession planning, if you are a consultant develop a cadre of like-minded peers who can back each other up during vacations.

- **Over-identification With Your Job.**

I find this trait in many high achievers. In pursuit of ever

more career and financial success they neglect (or relegate to a much less important level) the other essential areas of their LifeSpace. Health issues, marital satisfaction, child rearing, community involvement, spiritual development, social relationships, retirement planning all pale in comparison to the energy, focus and time invested in "the job" or "the career". I'm often told "I'll have time to focus on that stuff later on but for right now ...". Sometimes a revised awareness comes with a frightening medical diagnosis, or a late night call from the police, or the letter from a divorce attorney, sometimes "later" never comes. Certainly your job is important but you are not your job. Are you working to live, or living to work?

- **Job Security or Financial Fears.**

In an era of ever more layoffs, RIFs (reductions in force) and downsizing many folks understandably worry that if they take their earned vacation time they will be labeled as "non-essential". The way to combat this fear is to involve yourself in projects that are essential to the organization and to do so in a way that your contribution cannot be missed. In that way your occasional absence will be overshadowed by your impact on the organization. The self-employed and many commissioned salespeople live in a "no work / no pay" world. This money fear can be counter-balanced with both a logical and emotional appreciation of the very real benefits of renewed focus, restored energy, improved health and the increased productivity that a vacation can bring.

- **The Perfect Vacation.**

There is no perfect, one size fits all vacation. What was fun last year might not be right this year. What you want to do might not be right for other family members. Are you up for trying something new or are you in the mood for the tried and true? The keys here are planning and communication. Part of the enjoyment of a vacation is researching locations and figuring out what you want to do once you get there. Getting input from all who will be involved and discussing the pros and cons of various activities well before the vacation will minimize conflicts and encourage people to accommodate each other's needs and preferences.

- **Lowering the Money Hurdle.**

Yes, a vacation costs money. But it doesn't have to break the bank. Have you ever noticed the fun things that you

only do when you show visitors around your town or region? You can take a few days and be a tourist at home. Try a new restaurant, hit a tourist trap, go on a picnic, visit an old haunt you've missed, see a matinee movie, have a potluck dinner, unplug the phone for an intimate afternoon at home with your partner, or see the current show at your favorite museum. Maybe plan on some alone time at home– or even a few days at a spiritual retreat (often very economical). Break out of your routine by meeting some new people through a volunteer community activity like a local food pantry or a Habitat for Humanity project. And, to relieve some future financial strain, start putting aside a few pesos now for next year's vacation.

- **Monitor Your Re-entry.**

Ok, now you're back at work. Was vacation fun, tiring, frantic, relaxing, dull, too costly, exciting? What did you learn about how and where you vacation that should be integrated into your future vacation planning? Did this respite send you back to work rested and invigorated, had you postponed this vacation for so long that you were too tired to enjoy it, did you find yourself getting new and creative ideas about work, did you start doing some realistic thinking about retirement life or did it confirm a hidden notion that maybe it's time for a job or career change? A change of pace, a change of scenery, a change in your routine will stimulate your thinking in many ways. If you keep a journal, capture these thoughts for continued reflection. In any event, put time aside to discuss with those closest to you what this vacation meant to you and to your future.

LifeMap is about helping you achieve your desired level of balance between work life, home life, societal life and your individual life and there's no better tool to help you do this than a well-planned vacation. So get out there, see some new sights, gain some new insights, re-charge those batteries and enjoy!

Resources

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Sincerely,

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