

Vacation - Dare I Try to Go at All?

07/25/05

Vacation! It's that time of year for most of us! And as owners, we often agonize over whether we can, or should, get away from the business. Spouses and kids ask us who counts more – the business or them. Friends tease us for being too closely tied to the business, and not being able to let go. We look at the stacks of stuff on our desk and wonder who will deal with it in our absence. Sound familiar?

Here are some “how to’s”, which may make it a more meaningful experience, as you head off. Treat this year as practice, for what you want to have happen next year. Put someone in charge. Set clear ground rules. Give someone the job of traffic cop. Know that you, too, deserve, and will benefit from, a break.

If you work on building routines inside the company that enable you to get away, it will usually get easier as time goes by. Before you leave, hold a meeting to talk with everyone about what you want to have happen in your absence. When you get back, have another meeting to talk about what went right, and what may need to change next time you try this. Tell your staff you are practicing, and ask them to participate with you and make suggestions.

Designate someone in the organization who everyone goes to, with anything they might usually bring to you. This can be

anyone in the organization who has the ability to sort through issues and decipher their real level of priority. It should be someone who you can count on to ask for assistance from others, if they think they need it. It also is best if this person is around, and easily reachable. It may be your receptionist. It should definitely be someone with good communication and note-taking skills. Ask them to keep a log each day, of the issues that come up, and how they were handled. When you get back, review that log to check if there is anything you need to follow up on.

Define the rules as to how things will be handled while you are away. Make it clear everyone is to communicate with the person in charge. Let the person in charge know when it might be appropriate to contact you, and how to do that – by phone, email, etc. Try to set it up so that you won't get any calls. Remember, the purpose of going away, is to go away.

Make a short list of really big things that might hit your desk while you are away – a new bid coming in, a proposal that has to get out, a key client who might call, a project that might need to be handled. For each big item, write down what is to be done in your absence, and try to avoid the words, “contact me”. Assign each item to someone in the organization. Meet with your designated “handlers”, and tell

them what you expect them to do in your absence.

Put one person in charge of going through your mail, phone and email messages each day. Empower them to toss the junk mail – no sense looking at a box of it when you return! Tell them names to watch for – such as clients, prospects and key vendors - and give them direction on what to do if those names pop up. Tell your message and mail person to inform people that you are away, things are being handled in your absence, and then to ask how they can be of assistance until you return. Ask that a phone, email and mail log be kept, including notes on any outcomes and next steps. Review that log when you get back, for actions you might need to take.

When you get back, look at any break-downs as indicators of where you need to build better solutions for next time. Don't let yourself get discouraged because everything doesn't go smoothly. And whatever you do, don't step in and start rescuing people, just because they struggle with how to handle things in your absence. Give them space to work it out.

The purpose of a vacation is to get away and recharge. We all need that break, and are entitled to it. So take it. Don't take a back of stuff to work on. Don't tell your staff to call you if they need you. Don't spend an hour a day going through your emails. Instead, give



Trusted Advisor to Business Owners

Vacation - Dare I Try to Go at All?

07/25/05

the bag to someone else to work on, in your absence. Let someone else handle it for you.

This is like learning anything new. You'll find with practice, that it gets easier. And as an extra benefit, you'll find your staff will build confidence that they can handle things, once you return, as well. True independence, as an owner, comes when you can say, "I know it's being taken care of. I trust my staff can handle things". Start working towards that reality.

Looking for a good book? Remember, it's vacation time. Stock up on something that gets you away from the business entirely. The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini is engrossing and can be had on tape as well as hard copy and soft cover. Tuesdays with Morrie by Mitch Albom is on the non-fiction best seller lists. 1776 by David McCullough is for you history buffs. The Secret Man by Bob Woodward will fill you in on the details of Watergate's Deep Throat. Malcolm Gladwell is always interesting, "The Power of Thinking Without Thinking". And for those of you looking ahead to the Supreme Court decisions we'll be dealing with shortly, you might want to consider Closed Chambers by Edward Lazarus or The Majesty of the Law, Reflections of a Supreme Court Justice, by Susan Day O'Connor.

Business owners regularly turn to Ask Andi and Strategy Leaders for advice on how to grow profitable, successful companies. They find what they need time after time. Specific advice is available at www.AskAndiBlog.com. Ask Andi is also published weekly in the Westchester and Fairfield County Business Journals and Hudson Valley Business. Written by Strategy Leaders President, Andi Gray, the Ask Andi column is a rich source of advice for owners of established, privately held businesses.

*If you are a business owner and you have a question or would like to discuss some aspect of your business, call **1.877.238.3535** or send an email to AskAndi@StrategyLeaders.com.*