

## Vacation Time Again!

08/11/08

This time of year is vacation time for lots of people. How are your plans coming along? Have you been yet? Are you planning to go? Who's minding things in and on the business while you're out? If you've already been on vacation, how smoothly did things go while you were away? If you don't have plans to get away, think about it. What's holding you back?

That's a whole boatload of questions. The questions are designed to get you, as a small business owner, to think about your relationship to your company – and its relationship to you. Vacations are perfect times to think through preparedness, and test the company's readiness to run without you.

When you're thinking about going on vacation, start with an overall picture. What do you want the company to accomplish while you're gone? Who will be in charge of decision making? When will people need to meet, to discuss what's going on and make mid-course corrections? What are the major things that might cause problems in your absence? Any big projects or customer requests that need attending to?

If you've already been on vacation, do a post-vacation wrap up with your staff, customers and vendors. Was there anything that couldn't be solved without you? Did decision making go smoothly,

or did people end up debating who was in charge? How about information flow – was everyone informed and up to date throughout your absence? What information was waiting for you when you returned?

Think of vacations as a readiness test – ready to operate without you, the owner. And that's your ultimate goal. If the business can function without you, it has greater sale value. Taking you out of the middle of everything means less stress on you while you continue to own and operate the business. And if the business can function without you, you free up more of your time to work on the essential task of charting a course into the future.

Start with the overall picture. If you haven't tested the business' ability to operate without you before, start simply. Lay plans to go away for a few days. Next time you can implement the same planning steps for longer timeframes – two weeks, then three, then four.

Start planning several weeks before the actual departure date. Meet with staff to discuss how things will run and who will be in charge. Discuss what has to happen while you're away. Define how you want things to look when you get back. Decide on reports that will tell you how things went – income, expenses, goods shipped or services delivered, payroll vacation and days off

reports will all help you get back up to speed quickly. Practice having meetings, delegating, and looking at reports, and observe how people handle themselves.

Don't plan any appointments for the last day before you leave on vacation, or the first day you return. We all tend to rush at the last minute. That gets in the way of vacation planning and may cause you to miss an important planning step. Instead, have more time available than you need the last day or two before you leave, and the first day or two after you get back.

Discuss how emergencies will be handled. Ask staff to brainstorm how they will take action without contacting you. There's almost nothing that has to get dealt with immediately – it just sometimes feels that way. There's almost always a workaround, and your staff needs to figure that out.

Will additional help be needed in your absence? Are there things that only you can do? Who can you hire to do this stuff while you're gone?

Once you go out the door, put your cell phone on mute, and keep it there; even better if you can turn it off completely. Don't call to check in. You need downtime. That's what vacations are for. You only get downtime if you truly get away.



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When you return, don't head for your desk right away. Walk around, see how things are running. Thank people for taking over, and making it work. Call customers and vendors who had contact with the company while you were away. Get their impressions. Hold a staff meeting to discuss what went well, and what needs to be thought out or planned for next time.

Finally, schedule your next vacation right away. If you plan it into your schedule, you're more likely to get the breaks you need to refresh and rest up. And the company is more likely to get the break it needs from you, to find out how to run in your absence.

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