

Time off can be wise investment in yourself

The issue: Time off is scary.



Doyle

The scenario: I am 40 and have been a workaholic most of my career. I have advanced over the years, earning promotions and good money. For the first time, I am looking at taking some time off - no job - to spend with my wife and kids. But, the idea of not working also freaks me out. What advice do you have?

Coach: Kelley Doyle.

We live in a “connected” world. The idea of being away from the office, disconnecting from e-mail and the absence of deadlines make people queasy.

Taking care of business sometimes prevents us from taking care of ourselves. Are we so work-obsessed that we lose sight of the value of unplugging ourselves from it? Often, we are.

I have one client, I’ll call Jim, who despite having one year severance from his company, went

to work the next day in a new job. It’s a decision, years later, that he regrets. This summer he will take one month to consider his next career move and enjoy family time.

Some people take a break between jobs; others take longer paid or unpaid time from their company. Jim’s lessons apply to both situations:

1. Lay the groundwork. Plan at least three months ahead. Take a similar approach with your em-

ployer as a woman preparing for maternity leave: Give plenty of notice and take care of business before you depart.

2. Plan mentally. This coaching exercise was instrumental for Jim: List all the reasons for not taking the time off. For each reason, counter it with a strategy and solution. Spend real time thinking about it and apply your solutions.

3. Handle the fear of no income. Save enough to cover expenses. Pay yourself a salary while you are not working.

4. Remember the benefits. You can be a better and more energized person because of the break. A short vacation with the Blackberry is not escaping the grind.

5. List your projects and plans for the time off. This helped Jim overcome his concern that he would be bored. New and enjoyable activities filled his time.

Overworked employees burn out and aren’t productive. Most companies don’t have progressive responses to the issue.

EquiFirst, a mortgage com-

pany in Charlotte, is an exception. Senior Vice President Shawn Butterworth said a four-week paid sabbatical called Time Out is available to employees who have at least seven years of service and are in good performance standing. Employees need their manager’s approval and six months’ notice.

Time Out is popular with employees, and most use the time for family or travel. Employees return refreshed and grateful for the break. It is also a retention tool for the company.

“When people hit a wall, sometimes they think another job is the answer, but what they really need is a break,” Butterworth says.

The lesson is not to just take time off - invest in that time and you will invest in yourself.

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