

THE LEADERSHIP LENS Newsletter

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A monthly resource providing insight, opinion & practical information on life balance, creativity & personal leadership

Traveling for a Better Mindset Part 2

Last month I highlighted the importance of traveling as the absolute best way to understand the world and our place in it. By stepping away from our homes, our routines and the daily demands on our schedules, we can get a new perspective and we have the opportunity to increase our awareness. As school winds down and many people start to look forward to their summer vacation plans, this month's newsletter article address 'the how' to get the time off to travel in the first place. And one thing needs to be very clear when you are having the discussion about vacations and travel. It's not, "if I had the time" or "if I got the chance to travel;" rather, you should be thinking to yourself, "when I take my next trip" and "how I will make it all work out" from a professional and financial perspective. Your attitude needs to shift from the 'if' to the 'how.'

This week I presented my professional speaking program, "The Quest for Work/Life Balance" to employees at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This is the organization that helps to fund PBS and NPR. I especially like NPR as I awake to the broadcast every morning. The employees were very receptive to the importance of gaining more awareness of which taking a proper vacation is an integral part. An employee that came up to me after my program talked about her personal experiences with work/life balance. She has created lists that allow her to focus on being more balanced in many areas of her life, especially in the travel department. One of her lists is '50 places to visit before you die.' She has researched each location knowing when to go and how much she is going to need to get there.

I expect the *Christian Science Monitor* to write the next article on 'taking vacation time' as I contacted a reporter with additional information. They wanted to know if employees take all of their vacation time and if not, what stands in the way? Also, I submitted responses to a question about how to be mentally free of your job while on vacation? If you haven't already guessed, having an ample amount of quality vacation days each year is a personal hot button. Why? Because a good deal of whether an employee takes a vacation or not is based on fear. It's the "somebody might do my job better than me while I'm away fear" or the grapevine conversation that taking too much vacation is frowned upon by senior management fear.

I once interviewed at a company where they told me that they were closed two weeks a year (during the week of July 4th and during the Christmas/New Years week). I mentioned to the hiring manager that this was a thoughtful benefit. My mind was already coming up with scenarios about where I would be able to spend this additional time traveling. My next question must have thrown this hiring manager for a loop. I asked how much vacation time do employees get. He looked at me as if I was speaking a different language. He said, "Those two weeks are your vacation time. We simply make it convenient for everyone to take vacation all at the same time." I asked another employee after this interview if anyone takes vacation outside of the 'official' vacation time and he said it was frowned upon. There was a pretty strong reason why I never worked for that company!

I have worked for various organizations for over 17 years and have owned my own company for nearly 5 years. I have found that the following seven tips have made it much easier for me to take plenty of vacation and to foster what I like to call a 'vacation mentality.' It is my hope that some of these tips can be of benefit to you.

Foster Curiosity - make it a habit to always schedule some 'me time' when on a business trip, when visiting relatives or even when driving a different way home from work. When you build a sense of adventure into your everyday life, you'll be much more committed to having this same sense of adventure on your vacation.

Never Cancel - always make your vacation as urgent and important as your work. Treat it like a very important doctor's visit or an extended top client meeting. If you are needed during the time you are planning on being away, be firm and say that you are unavailable. Your backup plan should include how others will fill in for you while you are away. By taking your vacation, you are only strengthening your ability to work effectively when you return. Plus, if you cancel your plans, the danger is that they almost never get rebooked.

Always Take Between Jobs - when you are switching jobs, always, and I mean always, take at least two weeks off. It won't be counted against your vacation bank and you really need the time away to recharge and prepare for the next employer. It's a mistake to leave Friday afternoon from one job and then start Monday morning at the next one. Also, plan your next vacation before you start. After you get your offer letter, say that you'll be starting in two weeks and you have at least one vacation planned in the near future that cannot be changed. This continues the 'vacation mentality' to your next employer.

Negotiate for More - even though a company may have a written vacation policy, if they really want you, they will most often 'bend' the rules to accommodate you. I was able to turn three weeks of extra vacation into a 'signing bonus' - for a total of five weeks during my first year at a previous employer. Also, if you work a lot of extra hours or are away from home and your family, make it clear that you need to make up this time by having extra days of vacation. Remember to always use every ounce of your vacation time. I do the same thing with my frequent flyer miles. I can't imagine wasting a free air ticket.

Leave ALL Gadgets at Home - don't even think about bringing your laptop, PDA and cell phone. Checking your voice mail or e-mail from an Internet café should be unnecessary too. Again, make plans for others to fill in for you while you are away. The US Military does a very effective job of multiple role training. You need to do the same thing. Train others to handle your responsibilities while you are on vacation. Vacation comes from the Latin world, *vacatio*, which means to have freedom from duty or service. You need to clear your mind, not drag your business issues along with you around the world. Plus, if you take some really remote vacations, there will be no way to recharge your laptop in the mountains or get cell phone coverage.

Take Larger Chunks at Once - while you should always take the long weekends and wrap holidays into your vacation plans to extend your trip (further fostering the vacation mentality), you will start to feel a much different effect when taking vacations of at least two weeks or more at one time. It allows you to gain a deeper perspective and to really get in touch with your family, your location and yourself. You hopefully will come back from your vacation feeling refreshed and with what the Zen Buddhist's call a beginner's mind.

Change Your Attitude - I hate when people tell me that they are 'burning' vacation days. This sounds like they also burn money for fun too. Taking a proper vacation is one of the most important things you can do for your job and for your life. It is an integral part of living your life in balance. Change the 'burn' mentality to the opportunity one. Each vacation day and hour is an opportunity to explore the world, learn something and to take a much-needed break. Take advantage of it. You'll reap the benefits both personally and professionally.

According to an article on Jobs.net, Americans hand back more than \$21 Billion Dollars in unused vacation days each year. I find this figure appalling. If you don't set your vacation priorities, then something or somebody else will set them for you. It's no surprise that the United States is the only developed country in the world that doesn't have a vacation law on it's books. It simply doesn't make sense that a person with 20 years or more of experience gets the same or similar vacation to a new hire right out of college. For people with family and close friends scattered across the country and around the globe, having less than the optimum amount of vacation is unacceptable and leads to a higher than average turnover. I also find that the less vacations one takes, the less balanced one is. It's a major liability for any employer to have unbalanced employees.

It is during our time away from the job that we have the opportunity to strengthen our relationships, study something new and increase our awareness. Some employers worry that employees who take too much time off won't come back to work. Actually, if the company's values and mission match those of the employees, then the employee will certainly come back. It's not a good financial decision for any employer to have employees who don't really want to be there. My wife and I both worked with previous employers to take a vacation of two months a few years ago. This extended time away helped me to dig deeper into what I really wanted out of my life and it laid the groundwork for my current business. Without the time to step away and gain perspective about what is really important in life, you may never really know. Isn't it time that you took all of your vacation time and put it to good use? You'll come back to your work recharged, more focused and much more productive.

About Mark Sincevich:

Mark Sincevich is a professional photographer, author and speaker. He works with organizations and individuals that want to tap into their creative power. Through his photography experiences, Mark brings a unique angle to his professional speaking programs on life balance, creativity and photography. He is an active member of the National Speakers Association (NSA) and brings the insight of over 17 years of working for various organizations into his programs. Mark continues to sharpen his over 21 years in photography as an instructor at the Washington School of Photography and as a member of the American Society of Media Photographers (ASMP). Mark is frequently quoted in the media and his articles and photography have appeared in newspapers and magazines around the country. He is the author of three books including "The Real Ideal" and the soon-to-be released, "Snap: the ultimate guide to digital photography for the consumer." After his assignments, Mark can be found spending time with his family or writing in coffee shops with character. For more information on Mark's speaking programs, photography and products call (301) 654-3010 or visit www.staashpress.com.

Learn more about Work/Life Balance by booking Mark's program, "The Quest for Work/Life Balance"

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