



Plan Your Escape (Or: How to Take a Vacation)

Vacation you say! No way, can't be done. I can't afford it. I'm too busy. I don't have anyone to cover my cases. Never going to happen.

Well, I know how you feel. Getting away does take effort, but then most things do. The important point here? To remember the pay-off: rest, relaxation, rejuvenation. Ahhh... Sounds good already.

So don't despair. You CAN do it! Even if you're a solo, you can plan your escape. (And therein lies the key – *planning* your escape!) So without further adieu, [let me reprise](#): How to Take a Vacation.

I Can't Afford It

"If I'm not at the office, I can't bill. If I can't bill, I won't get paid." True enough, but there is a solution: budget for your vacation. A bit of research and number crunching is in order here. First, calculate your vacation expenses. This should be relatively easy. Next, quantify the lost revenue you need to replace during your time out of the office. Now that you know how much you need, begin setting aside funds *every week* to meet your financial goal. If necessary, find little ways to cut back that can really add up: like bringing your lunch to work, deferring your daily [Starbucks](#) fix, using public transportation, or telecommuting. Saving weekly will keep you on track and help manage expectations. If you're just getting started, then your plans this year may be more modest. Next year, you can begin saving for your summer vacation in January.

I'm Too Busy

Work will never go away, but I guarantee that if you look ahead in your calendar *you will find a block of time* with no commitments. Even if you haven't made plans yet, *block the time out now* before your calendar fills up. If you have a habit of backsliding, enlist your family as enforcers. This time should be sacred. If you need an extra incentive, consider non-refundable travel reservations.

Preparation is Key

If you're a member of a firm, going on vacation is a matter of meeting with other lawyers who will be covering cases during your absence. If you are a sole practitioner, use the buddy system. Find a colleague who is experienced in your practice area and willing to cover for you. This arrangement is usually reciprocal and is helpful if you have an unexpected absence from the office due to injury or a medical condition.

Get a game plan in place:

- Notify clients, opposing counsel, judges, or other appropriate parties that you will be out of the office;
- Prep your files. They should be well-organized and current, with status memos so your buddy can easily step in if needed;
- Create a “Countdown Schedule.” Identify what needs to be done when and whether certain tasks can wait until your return;
- Allow for wind down. As your vacation approaches, leave time in your schedule to finish up last minute work. Reduce or refer out new matters;
- Train staff. Do they have a clear understanding of office procedures? How will they screen client calls during your absence? Give them parameters for contacting you or your buddy in the event of an emergency.
- Resist constantly checking voice mail, e-mail, or text messages. Technology is a God-send, but [part of rejuvenation is taking a break from our instant Internet society](#). Checking in is okay, but stick to a schedule to avoid obsessing over what is going on back at the office. Remember – you have an emergency plan in place. If something happens, staff or your buddy will get a hold of you.
- Avoid post-vacation overload. Just as you blocked out dates to go on vacation, allow yourself time to get back up-to-speed. Otherwise, you’re right back where you started.

Give yourself and your family a well-deserved break. With a bit of organization, you can budget for (and enjoy) your time off.

Copyright 2011 Beverly Michaelis

Originally published May 23, 2011 at

<http://oregonlawpracticemanagement.com/2011/05/23/plan-your-escape/>