

# We all need proper vacations



"What do I want to take home from my summer vacation? Time. The wonderful luxury of being at rest. The days when you shut down the mental machinery that keeps life on track and let life simply wander. The days when you stop planning, analyzing, thinking and just are. Summer is my period of grace."

Ellen Goodman

A few years ago, New York University sociologist Dalton Conley coined the term: "weisure" – the result of blurring the line dividing work and leisure. More and more, it seems, our work is spilling over into our leisure time. It appears that places and activities usually regarded as "fun only" are now work-play ambiguous. No surprise here!

Thanks to our smartphones, many of us are now chained to business colleagues while at home or hanging out with our families in the evening. We spend hours chatting on Facebook. And, of course, there are other electronic leashes to keep us connected when we're supposed to be "on vacation."

Some, including Conley, argue that this work-leisure phenomena is happening because more of us are finding work to be fun and want to stay connected during leisure periods. Really! Who's kidding whom!?

For couples and families who have an honest and sincere connection with one another, I wonder how they view the "fun of weisure" as a reason for disconnecting with one other. If you doubt

this, try asking ten of your friends how their partners or children feel about the separation caused by one of them experiencing all the "fun" doing business at home or on vacation.

Rather than enjoying the "fun" of doing business and choosing to stay connected 24/7, 365, my anecdotal research suggests that many people are:

1. Inundated with more and more work they cannot handle in a "normal" workday work and/or
2. Fearful, guilty or anxious that if they don't stay connected 24/7, 365, they may find themselves out of a job, and/or
3. They are addicted to their computers and/or
4. They have become estranged from their families in favor of social networking and connecting outside their relationship. In other words, their "lover" is the internet.

My take is that "weisure" is NOT ubiquitous because work now has more "meaning" or provides "fun". The test? If you won the lottery today would you continue to work as long and as hard in a 24/7, 365 "weisure" world? Of course you wouldn't.

### **The downside of "weisure"**

"No man needs a vacation so much as the man who has just had one"

Elbert Hubbard

The really upsetting fallout of living in a "weisure" world is the sacrifice of one's privacy and the loss of precious relaxation time. With the increasing blurring of work and leisure, research shows fewer and fewer folks are actually taking vacations. Many feel not only that they have to stay connected on holidays and weekends but that they actually fear they might lose their jobs if they went on vacation.

For those who actually do take a vacation, many need to unwind after they come back from a "weisure-driven" vacation because they are as stressed when they return as they were before they left.

Stressed out, overworked and overwhelmed, many folks need time off but are worried and fearful that a short vacation could lead to a permanent one. They feel dammed if they do; damned if they don't. Not a very psychologically healthy place to be.

The effects of a "weisure" lifestyle are quite disturbing. More and more folks are experiencing stress-related illness, family dysfunction and disruption, making it really tough for them to hold it together at work.

### **Some Questions for Self-Reflection**

- When was your last "real" vacation?
- What are the elements of a favorite vacation for you?
- Do you take the type of vacation that really nourishes you? Be honest.
- How do you prepare for your vacation?
- How do you transition from vacation to home to work?
- How is the first week back after your return?
- What did you discover about yourself on recent vacations? Did you have time for any discovery?
- Is there something you learned about yourself on vacation that influences a change you want to implement into your everyday life?
- How do you experience yourself on vacation? Do you enjoy your "self" away from the everyday routine?
- Was your work life and home life supported in your absence? Were the bases covered?
- Were you able to really disengage or were your Blackberry and laptop travelling with you?
- What was vacation like before you had a Blackberry, I-phone or laptop?
- How much vacation time do you have and take each year? How much do you need?
- Has your relationship suffered because of your "weisure" activities? Be honest. What would your partner or children say?
- What were vacations like when you were growing up?
- Can you visualize a world where you can take a vacation and truly leave work behind? Would you want to?

As a result, the workplace is being populated by ever-growing numbers of disengaged, unproductive, underperforming and exhausted employees – not to mention those experiencing serious states of depression, addiction, self-neglect and serious overt or silent anger.

At home, these folks now have no idea how to "take it easy" or relax without working.

The parking areas of many of the office parks I run through, and drive around, are often one quarter or more full on weekends, evenings and holidays. "Weisure?"

### **Why vacations and honest leisure time are important**

"Using a camera appeases the anxiety which the work-driven feel about not working when they are on vacation and supposed to be having fun. They have something to do that is like a friendly imitation of work: they can take pictures."

Susan Sontag

Simple, taking time for one's self is a non-negotiable "must" to maintain a healthy mind, body and soul. It's impossible to run a car engine on all cylinders 24/7, 365. The human body, mind and psyche are no different - dependency on energy drinks notwithstanding.

Leisure time and vacations are preventative medicine. They allow time for de-stressing, decompressing, rejuvenating, replenishing and re-connecting with one's self. It is only when we consciously allow a real genuine opportunity of space for relaxation and novelty that we can discover the unconscious level of tension and stress we've been carrying day-to-day. In fact, the first few days of vacation usually begin the process of unwinding, which is followed by the recognition of a need for rest, relaxation and a deeper settling of our body, mind and spirit.

If you're fortunate, your vacation can even be long enough to allow you to enter into the phase of real rejuvenation.

Now the greater question is: what type of vacation do you take? For some people vacation is wall-to-wall sightseeing, visiting family, exercise boot camp, or staying "connected" i.e., doing, doing, doing, which is inevitably followed by that odd aftermath of "I need a vacation from my vacation."

"And so we take a holiday, a vacation, to gain release from this bondage for a space, to stand back from the rush of things and breathe again. But a holiday is a respite, not a cure. The more we need holidays, the more certain it is that the disease has conquered us and not we it. More and more holidays just to get away from it all is a sure sign of a decaying civilization; it was one of the most obvious marks of the breakdown of the Roman Empire. It is a symptom that we haven't learned how to live so as to re-create ourselves in our work instead of being sapped by it."

Evelyn Underhill

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