

How to Take a Vacation

By Randy Myers | [Business on Main](#)



Nearly three-quarters of Americans plan to take vacation away from home this summer, according to a USA Today/Gallup poll. Will you be among them?

Breaking away for a vacation is notoriously difficult for many small-business owners. For some, it's a matter of temperament — entrepreneurs passionate about what they do often find it difficult to put work aside for even a few days. For others, it's logistics — with few people on the payroll, being down even one person can be a challenge.

Still, studies have shown that vacations are critical to our personal and professional well-being. In 2006, Big Four accounting firm Ernst & Young found that for each additional 10 hours of vacation its employees took, their year-end performance ratings improved 8 percent. The famous Framingham Heart Study, ongoing since 1948, found that men who skipped vacations for five consecutive years were 30 percent more likely

to suffer heart attacks than those who took off at least a week each year.

The good news? My own informal survey of small-business owners suggests that it is possible to get away. But planning is important.

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Laying the groundwork

Small-business owners who take vacations say their planning begins before calling their travel agent or scouring the Web for the right destination. It starts with grooming the people who work for them, especially key managers.

"Teach employees to think like you," advises Heidi Lamar, owner of Spa Lamar in Scottsdale, Arizona. Once you've given them some guidelines, she adds, give them the latitude to make decisions.

Don't be afraid to teach explicitly. "When a decision you need to make comes up, get everyone together and tell them why and how to make that decision," says Allan Branch, co-founder of LessEverything, a software and conference business based in Jacksonville, Florida.

If you're a bigger small business, you may also find it helpful to set and review department objectives on a recurring basis — monthly, quarterly or annually — so that all managers know exactly what's expected of them, even when you're on vacation, says Rick Lindquist, president of Zane Benefits Inc. in Park City, Utah.

Kathryn Kerrigan, founder, CEO and creative director of Kathryn Kerrigan Footwear in Libertyville, Illinois, says it's also a good idea to designate one person to be in charge during your absence. And to avoid misunderstandings, make sure everyone knows who that person is.

The goal in all of this, of course, is to create an environment in which you're not the only person who knows how to run your company. "Doing everything yourself is a sure-fire way to become a slave to your business," says Lamar. "As long as you are indispensable, you can never take a vacation."

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Implementation

Once you've laid the groundwork for a vacation, conduct a trial run. "Take a whole day off without checking in," Lamar says. "Then, when your employees prove they can handle it, take a long weekend."

When you're ready for a full-blown getaway, minimize the potential for problems by scheduling it when your business is normally slow, says Alexia Bregman, co-founder and head of marketing for Vuka LLC, a Solana Beach, California-based maker of energy drinks. If your business isn't cyclical, at least choose a time when nothing crucial is planned.

Solo practitioners

Timing is doubly important for business owners who have no employees, since they have no one else to take over the reins.

To make her vacations workable, Tiffany Lewis, solo operator of Tiffany Lewis Skin Care Center in St. Charles, Illinois, notifies clients a week before she leaves, and asks if they need anything prior to her departure. She organizes her salon and stocks up on supplies to ease the post-vacation transition back to work.

Actual vacation planning is done early in the year — January — so that she can easily block off the dates on her work schedule. "That is a good time, because business is typically slower," she notes. "Plus, depending upon where you live, it can be a gloomy time of year, so planning your vacation gives you something to look forward to."

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Staying connected — or not

Once you are away, of course, the big question is just how away you should be. Many small-business owners like to disconnect completely, but if you can't, they advise setting boundaries, not only for your benefit but also for that of your vacation partner and employees.

Kerrigan typically checks in with her staff just once a day, and schedules two days for no contact with the office at all — no calls in, no calls accepted, no checking her phone for emails.

Bregman endorses this minimalist approach. "By all means, take the technology with you that allows you to be physically away from your business," she says. "But you are on vacation, so make sure you see it as that."

Lamar agrees. "When you realize you have been away for several days without even thinking about your business, you will have achieved the ultimate goal," she says. "You own the business. It doesn't own you."



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