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How Using Vacation Days Can Save Your Life

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Does your job leave you feeling overworked, stressed, fatigued and just plain burnt out? Ask yourself how many vacation days you took this year and you may find out why. An incredible 47 percent of 730 U.S. executives surveyed by Management Recruiters International said they wouldn't use all of their vacation days. The reasons varied from job pressure to unsupportive supervisors to heavy workloads, but the effect was the same. We need rest and relaxation to be healthy, and constant work without play will take its toll on our bodies.

U.S. employers offer the fewest vacation days of nearly every modern country in the world. By law workers in European Union countries enjoy four weeks of paid vacation, and Canadian and Japanese workers get a minimum of two weeks vacation. However, Americans often don't even take what little vacation they do get in order to rejuvenate themselves. A 2003 Expedia.com study estimated that there was \$21 billion in unused vacation time for that year. The next year's study results found that job pressure caused 35 percent of employees to miss vacation again.

Quality Time Living Model

The Quality Time Living Model, a three-part plan for balancing your life taken from my bestselling book, *The 100 Year Lifestyle*, offers a good perspective on how to leave work at work and really enjoy the time off that you've earned. Before the year even begins, divide your annual calendar into three categories: prime time, prep time and play time. Utilizing this approach will help you optimize your financial, professional and personal fulfillment and can even save your life because relaxation is a crucial part of quality health.

Prime time is when you generate results, whether through building relationships or earning money, by using your talents and abilities in effective ways to create value in the world. However, don't allow work to define your life. Organize your time, set goals, and work on planning your long-range strategy during prep time.

Time to Play

A balanced calendar always includes ample playtime set aside to enjoy life. Playtime can include Sunday afternoon picnics, week long beach vacations or even yearlong sabbaticals, depending on your needs and priorities. Mostly this concept is simply about enjoying your life, and that includes taking your vacation days.

Conscientious workers often feel guilty about leaving work behind, but a vacation can help your body get needed rest and rejuvenation and inspire your mind by with culture and adventure. Many people come back to work from vacation with a refreshed and recharged feeling which enhances creativity and productivity, and, ultimately, financial success. Taking time off recharges your batteries and keeps you physically and mentally healthier. Additionally, spending enjoyable, relaxing time with a loved one keeps your relationship strong. Not surprisingly, a study by the Arizona Department of Health and Human Services found that women who took vacations were more satisfied with their marriages.

Your ratio of prime time, prep time and play time days will vary as you grow in income, security and age. Build flexibility into your plan because balance is key. How you spend your time is one of the many aspects of your life that you can control.

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