

## Tips for a Stress-Free Vacation

Who couldn't use a vacation? Payroll and Accounts Payable professionals, in particular, may be feeling that some time away from the office is just what they need to recharge both personally and professionally.

A vacation may be especially valuable in the current business environment. A recent Robert Half International survey of finance and human resources managers worldwide found that economic conditions have contributed to heavier workloads, higher stress levels and lower morale among accounting and finance professionals.

Respondents to the survey said their accounting and finance departments have taken steps such as implementing hiring freezes and layoffs and consolidating roles to manage through the downturn. Not surprisingly, it's all added up to more strain on financial professionals.

Asked how current economic conditions have affected their individual employees, nearly half (48 percent) of U.S. respondents cited increased stress, compared to 39 percent globally. The next most commonly cited effects, both globally and in the United States, were heavier workloads and decreased morale.

Overburdened accounting and finance professionals may feel that taking a vacation right now is a luxury they can't afford; however, the truth is that getting off the work treadmill can boost your productivity in the long run and help alleviate stress and burnout.

Moreover, the summer months are an ideal time to get away from it all. A separate Robert Half survey found that executives consider July and August to be the best months for employees to take time off. Not only are these months opportune for hitting the beach or exploring a new locale, but the business pace often slows at this time of year.

Although taking a vacation is good for the mind and spirit, preparing to leave the office for an extended period can also bring its share of stress. With a little preparation, however, you can enjoy a relaxing respite from the office. Here are some tips for making sure your next vacation is worry free:

***Time it right.*** Even if summer is a slow period in your office, it's wise to schedule ahead. This helps ensure you'll secure the dates you want and gives your supervisor time to assess anticipated workloads and resource requirements and arrange for temporary help, if needed.

When choosing your leave dates, take into account any activities your department may be focused on during the time period you're considering. If a big initiative is in the works, you may want to consider postponing your time off. Also, if your job involves significant interaction with internal customers or external clients, check that they're not expecting to

have any out-of-the-ordinary requests during your desired vacation dates. Once you finalize your plans, be sure to let all team members and key outside contacts know so that they can plan project needs around your absence.

**Arrange for back-up.** Determine who will handle your responsibilities while you're away. Your supervisor can help you identify who is best suited to fill in for you in different areas. Also, provide your customers, boss and co-workers with a list of colleagues who will handle specific jobs for you. Before leaving on vacation, you may want to plan a meeting with your fill-ins to review upcoming tasks, deadlines and any special circumstances they need to know.

**Use out-of-office functions.** Let those who call or e-mail know you're away by changing your voice mail greeting and e-mail settings, and provide the name of your back-ups so important messages aren't left unanswered.

**Take advantage of technology.** Probably the worst thing about taking a vacation is coming back to a deluge of e-mail. To avoid being overwhelmed upon your return, take advantage of e-mail settings that help you organize incoming messages. For example, you may want to categorize mail by internal and external senders or designate messages from certain contacts to also be received by the individuals who will be covering for you while you're away. This will help ensure that nothing slips through the cracks while you're gone and also that you have a record of what took place in your absence.

**Try to unplug.** If possible, cut the tether with your office when you take vacation time. Try to avoid checking work e-mail and encourage your colleagues to call you only for urgent matters. It's difficult to really get away from work and enjoy your time off when you're in touch with the office twice a day. If your job requires you to check in, do so only when necessary and let people know when you'll be contacting the office so they can be prepared to discuss any issues. If you absolutely must work some during your time off, check in advance to make sure you can use your laptop or mobile e-mail device from your vacation destination.

Finally, try not to stretch yourself to the breaking point right before you head off for vacation. While it inevitably gets hectic at the office before taking time off, don't delay your preparations for the final week, when you'll likely have other last-minute vacation details to address. Knowing that everything has been taken care of well in advance will allow you to truly enjoy your time away from the office.

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