

Reduce Vacation Stress – Have an Office Exit and Re-Entry Plan

Congratulations! You're going on vacation. Your time away is well-deserved, much-needed and long overdue. Whether you're taking a vacation or a 'staycation', being away from the office for several days or weeks will most likely bring on even more stress. Organizing your office and planning your exit first can make it easier to leave and enjoy yourself while you are gone.

Here are some tips to help you relax more when you get away:

1. **Organize your desktops.** Clear your physical desktop of clutter. Clearly label critical files and place them in a desktop file sorter so they are visible and accessible for the person(s) who is covering for you. Organize your computer desktop so important documents are easy to find, place them on a shared drive, or put them on a jump drive so others can access if needed.
2. **Evaluate your daily work flow and open projects.** Delegate tasks and pre-pay bills that must be handled in your absence. Brief the person covering for you on open projects and next steps. (If you are the only one who knows certain procedures, be sure you leave instructions for systems access or how to accomplish tasks.)
3. **Decide how to handle mail, e-mail and voice mail.** Designate and assign a specific container in your office for new mail and other hard-copy paperwork so you don't return to scattered piles in multiple places on your desk. If your computer is equipped with it, set the out-of-office assistant on your e-mail to send automatic vacation replies to incoming e-mails. Record a phone message letting callers know you are out of the office. Include if you will be checking messages and a number for a backup contact if you have one.
4. **Notify your colleagues, clients and vendors in advance.** Let them know when you will be gone, how any open issues will be handled in your absence, and that you will touch base when you return.
5. **Contact information.** Give your contact information to key people. Tell them to contact you *only* in an emergency.
6. **Limit checking your Blackberry/iPhone.** Commit to checking messages no more than twice a day while you're gone. Remember – you're on vacation to relax and rejuvenate.
7. **Come back at least a day before your stated return.** Having a buffer day before you are "in" again allows for unexpected delays on your return trip, gives you time to unpack and get back in your routine, and lets you review your e-mail and voicemails at your leisure so you know what you need to address right away when you are 'officially' back at work.