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How to disconnect from work and enjoy your vacation

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) on August 20th, 2012

Last month, I did something I've never done before. I spent two weeks 100% disconnected from my work. No cell phone, computer, e-mail or iPhone.

This was a difficult decision to make. I might miss a potential executive coaching client, speaking opportunity or interview with the media. I was hesitant to completely unplug, disconnect and disengage from work. At the end of the two weeks, I was rested, relaxed and rejuvenated because I was able to slow down and decompress.

Vacations give you a chance to unwind, to enjoy life, and to keep your work-life balance from swinging too far toward work. They allow you to take a step back from your normal, stressful routine and enjoy a bit of rest and relaxation — that is, if you actually take them.

Unfortunately, too many Americans skip their vacations. Some are afraid of falling behind and having to work extra hard to get caught up when they return. Others worry that company leaders will decide they can do without them. Whatever the reason for skipping your vacation, you are depriving yourself of more than a trip to the beach or the mountains.

Skipping vacations can lead to a loss of productivity and creativity, negatively impact the quality of your work, and eventually cause burnout. On top of that, it is bad for your health. Both men and women who take infrequent vacations have a higher mortality rate, especially from coronary heart disease (**Framington Heart Study, 1992, Journal of Psychosomatic Medicine, 2000**).

When you do take your vacation, make sure you disconnect completely. Forget working smarter while you're away, as suggested in a recent **Fast Company** article. You won't get the full benefits of taking a vacation if you're still working. Instead, take the following steps to ensure that you are able to fully enjoy your time off and come back to work refreshed, recharged, and ready to put your heart into your work again:

1. **Train your replacement well in advance.** Take a cue from McDonald's CEO Jim Skinner, who requires each executive to train two potential replacements. For many, the idea of having someone ready to take over their job at a moment's notice can be scary — after all, the company wouldn't be faced with a long hiring process if they decided to fire you. But the benefits far outweigh the risks. If there is someone else who can do your job, you can take your vacation without worrying about whether your work is getting done. In addition, you are prepared for unexpected time off. If you need to take a few sick days or some time off for bereavement, you'll know you are covered.
2. **Don't spend the whole time traveling.** Too often, vacations are a harried, nonstop flurry of activity. You have your bags packed ahead of time, leave right after work on Friday or first thing Saturday morning, and go, go, go the whole time, arriving home the day before you're due back to work. Leave a two-day cushion at the beginning and end of your vacation, and spend some time at home resting, reading and allowing yourself to truly recharge.
3. **Don't answer your phone.** If work calls, resist the urge to pick up the phone. You're on vacation. True emergencies are rare. You're unlikely to be missing anything that can't wait, and chances are, if you've properly trained your replacement, he or she can handle whatever crises arise in your absence.

After taking a real vacation — without bringing my work along — I am returning with renewed enthusiasm, ready to tackle new projects and challenges. Next time you take time off work, consider turning your cell phone off and resist the urge to check your e-mail several times per day. You'll enjoy your vacation a lot more, and you'll enjoy your work more when you return.

*Joel Garfinkle, author of "**Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level**," is an executive coach who has worked with executives from many of the world's top companies. Garfinkle has been featured on National Public Radio, ABC News, The New York Times, Forbes, and many other media outlets. He is recognized as one of the top executive in America and has written over 300 articles on leadership. Visit GarfinkleExecutiveCoaching.com for more information about Garfinkle's coaching services and to sign up for the free **Fulfillment@Work** newsletter.*