

# SOURCE LINES

## Get The Most Out Of Summer Holidays

**S**ummer is usually associated with fun in the sun, outdoor activities, and total relaxation. For most of us, it also happens to be vacation time. So before you head out, here are a few ideas and tips to help you get the most out of the summer season.

### Why take vacations?

Are vacations really necessary? The answer might seem obvious, but nearly a third of all Canadians don't take all their available vacation time. They also don't realize the immediate and longer term impacts this can have.



No matter what you do for a living, work requires energy and concentration.

When we're tired, our bodies run on borrowed energy and we're not usually aware of what that can mean for our overall health. Over the long term, if we don't disconnect from work every now and then, we risk burning out.

Simply taking a vacation has many benefits. It allows our bodies - and our minds - to relax and re-energize. Which in turn allows us to enjoy ourselves, to spend time with family and friends, and to find our old selves again.

The benefits continue even after we go back to work. We tend to be in better spirits for one thing. And being physically out of the workplace gives us more objectivity, so we're better able to manage any situations that do come up once we're back.

Vacations also give us the time - and the freedom - to deal with all those things that we've been putting on the back burner. The bonus is the peace of mind that comes with finally having accomplished those tasks.

If you're nervous about being away for more than a week or if it's simply not convenient, arrange to divide up your vacation in a way that suits you better. Some people need a minimum of two weeks to really disengage from work, while others prefer to spread the days out so they're off more but for shorter periods. What's important is to know what you need, and to plan vacations that will meet those needs.

### How to get the most out of our vacations

Despite the amount of time we spend dreaming about our holidays, do we really get the maximum benefit? Most of us know what it feels like to come back from a vacation or a few days off feeling just as tired as when we left. Even on holiday, minor cares and concerns can sap our energy, cancelling out the hoped-for benefits of being away. The recommendations that follow are designed to help you disconnect so you can get the max out of your holidays:

- **Organize your departure from the office**  
Head out on vacation without giving the office a second thought by first prioritizing your tasks, and then taking care of the most urgent ones. Set things up so that the work continues to be done while you're gone (let your colleagues know how long you'll be away, make sure they have the relevant information, etc). Remember, time spent

worrying about work takes more energy than you'd think.

- **Leave your work at work**

Holidays are for relaxing and recharging your batteries. Start by disconnecting from your daily routine, which means leaving behind all those electronic devices you use to stay in touch with work. The innocuous-seeming act of checking your emails or voice mail can undermine all the good that comes from being away.

- **Choose the right vacation**

Plan a vacation that is right for you, a holiday that fits with your life and your needs of the moment. Figure out your priorities and stick to your choices as much as possible. Some people find that traveling on their own is the best way to disconnect, while others prefer to be with family or friends. And consider doing something completely different with your time off (relax and read instead of going sightseeing, visit a destination you've never been to before...).

- **Think of yourself first**

Travelling with family or friends usually involves making compromises or being flexible in order to accommodate the group. Even under these circumstances, it's important to arrange time or activities for yourself. Bring along a family member who could look after the children for an hour or two, or invite one of your children's friends to come on vacation with you - good strategies for getting a little time to yourself.

- **Plan for free time**

No matter what kind of vacation you've settled on, build in a good balance between activity and rest. Planning too many activities could easily turn out to

be a bad idea. After all, things come up (the weather can change for instance) that could force a change of plans. Make sure there are a few days with nothing on; that way, it will be easier to reorganize activities, plus it leaves room for spontaneity, for doing things on the spur of the moment.

- **Above all, take it easy**

Summers in general and vacations in particular should be all about happiness! Yours, your family's and your friend's. Take advantage of the many pleasures life - and the sunny season - have to offer. And if despite everything, something unexpected comes up, try to make the most of the situation: a rainy day is ideal for sleeping in for instance, or for a board game marathon, or an afternoon at the movies.

**And for those who either have no vacation time this summer...or just a few days off...**

You don't need tons of time to disconnect from work. In fact, evenings and weekends give you lots of opportunity to enjoy the summer season and its many pleasures.

Just taking a break from your daily routine, trying new activities, or going somewhere you've never been before are great ways to leave the office behind and recharge the batteries.

So whether you take your vacation now or later, whether you have a couple of weeks or a couple of days, make the most of it, and have a great time!

This issue of SourceLines was written by Dr. Martine Gaudreau, Psychologist, with Les Consultants Longpré & Associés inc. an associate agency in Quebec.