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COLUMNIST

5 Ways to Take an Instant 'Virtual' Vacation (No Matter How Much Time You Have)

Do you need to get away? Whether it's a 15 minute vacation-in-your-office or a real vacation , a little time off can help you get back on track.



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IMAGE: Getty Images

Summer is swiftly coming to an end, and the question remains--have you taken your vacation yet?

When one client I'm coaching, we'll call him Stephen, told me he hadn't made time for one yet, I told him to take a "virtual vacation."

Stephen walked along the sunny path with his spaniel Sporty panting by his side, the two of them trotting along cheerfully downhill toward the lake. At last, free from the pressures of the office...free from the demands of the clients...free from the deadlines and the numbers...Stephen was *finally on vacation*. He parked himself on a rock at the edge of the beach and laid back to take in the view. Sitting in the sun in his shorts and hiking boots, he allowed his mind to empty completely.

Stephen breathed deeply and closed his eyes. He lay there, breathing, smiling, resting, he didn't know how long. At ease. At peace. Alone. He dozed. When his nap was over, he stretched long and grinned. What a feeling! And the best part was, he could come back here anytime he wanted. It was only a moment away.

Stephen opened his eyes, took his feet off his desk, and turned back to the computer. Just 15 minutes of rest and an imagined trip to the mountains, and he felt completely renewed.

Do you need to get away? Whether it's a 15 minute vacation-in-your-office like Stephen's or a *real* vacation for rest and restoration, a little time off can help you stop feeling like *you're* a little off. Try one of these five ways to take your "virtual" vacation now:

The instant escape. Meditation is an art form practiced around the world for finding inner quietude. It can reduce stress, calm your mind, and clear your thoughts wherever you are--walking, driving, or sitting right where you are. In its simplest form, the entire process is: Close your eyes. Breathe. Clear your mind.

That's it. Try it now. Breathe in deeply and slowly, breathe out deeply and slowly, feel your body relaxing, and gently release any thought that comes to mind. Close your eyes and try it for two more long, slow breaths. Notice the difference. You can meditate for just a few minutes, or keep practicing for longer and longer.

When you're going top speed, slowing down in the middle of the day can sometimes seem like the hardest thing to do. But you carry within you the peace you need, and you can find it anytime.

The 10-minute escape. Stephen's virtual vacation, as you saw above, is really just a form of meditation with a twist. As you do in meditation, close your eyes, breathe deeply, and release all thoughts. Then fill your mind with images, thoughts, or even music. If you're worried about falling

asleep, set an alarm and tell yourself that if you do fall asleep, you'll awake feeling refreshed and energized.

The hour-long escape. You can combine the techniques of meditation and imagination with exercise to really come away revived and restored. Yoga, walking, running, biking and swimming have a rhythmic solitude that are especially well suited to resting the mind, but you can also get away from stress and frustration with any kind of sport.

Of course, it doesn't have to be exercise. A bath, a hot shower, an hour in the tub, some quiet time on the couch can all bring the rest you need if you're able to detach from the pressure and stress. Whatever you choose, be sure it *engages your mind*, either by helping you escape into a meditative state or getting you so involved in something else that you forget about work for awhile.

The full day retreat. How often do you take a day off? *Really* off, not to get stuff done but to get reconnected with yourself? If you plan a day off *for yourself*, even that one day can feel like a vacation. Think of it as a *retreat*; you are retreating from the world of work for a day to clear your head and gather your energy. Then make sure that's really what it is.

Be by yourself. Go to the beach. Get outdoors. Get away.

If you really want to make the most of this retreat, turn it into a weekend. You'll return with a new outlook on life.

The working vacation. If what you need isn't a day off but a day in, with all the time you need to get stuff done, give yourself a working vacation, or as I call it, "A Vacation in Your Office." You can also take a Vacation in your House. It's when you take a day to hold call calls (or better yet, turn off the phone), take no visitors, answer no questions, pretend you're on vacation and just blast through your To Do list. When you need to get to the bottom of those piles of paper, whittle down your To Do list, put away the holiday decorations, or just catch up on life, a working vacation can eliminate the tasks *and* the stress they cause.

With all of that said, one of my favorite time rules is to always have a vacation in Sight. No matter where you work or what you do for a living, you get to take a vacation. The simple fact that vacations are a *requirement* of every legal working contract acknowledges the fact that as people, we need to get away.

And it's not just a benefit for you. Good ideas need space, and they can't get it in a crowded mind. You need time off from work to think clearly and be your best. There are lots of ways you can clear

your mind, from a thirty-second meditation to a yoga class to a real vacation. Below follow some suggestions to get it.

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