

# How taking time out benefits your business

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When we are in an exercise regime, we don't think twice about rest days – they are actively encouraged by health professionals to improve your fitness as your body needs time to rest and regenerate after a day or two of exercise. The brain is the same, albeit not a muscle it behaves very much like one and needs a rest as much as our body does.

Mental fatigue can develop after too much time 'on-task' – according to one study this can start after 3 hours of continuous concentration time; other reports show this time as just 90 minutes. The stress that this causes the brain to be under reduces it to a narrow focus, making it difficult to concentrate on anything else and make good, rational decisions. With entrepreneurs working an average of 50.5 hours per week, compared to the UK average of 37 hours, it's important for business owners to take a break occasionally to avoid stress building up and long-term exhaustion.

Brain rest opportunities range from breaks during the day, to ways in which you can distract your work mind in the evening (this does not include watching television), to weekend activities, holidays and sleep. When taking breaks during the day, it is important to use the time for restorative activities such as social activities, napping, listening to music etc rather than for personal errands and tasks – this does not unwind the brain at all. Similarly eating lunch mindfully each day has a great effect on the brain but working while eating is of no help at all. Extended holidays (two weeks minimum) have a great effect on the brain and its performance, once we've given ourselves time to switch-off while away.

The importance of brain rest – both short breaks during the day and longer, extended breaks – is clear. We need to look after our brains and let it recharge so we can feel better and improve its performance. Here are some tips to ensure that you allow your brain to rest in order to work at its optimum performance:

## Take short breaks

An easy and obvious one to start with. Try and organise your calendar to include breaks and make sure you stick to it. Remember not to use this time to do other tasks, but to relax. One way of distracting the brain is to try a game or puzzle during these rest breaks – study revealed that it gives a different part of our brain the chance to solve the problem.

How about a mid-day nap? Evidence shows that people who take naps are more alert and productive and less likely to make mistakes than their colleagues who don't. It may not be practical in most work places, but for those who work from home why not try it! If this isn't possible, meditating for 10 minutes a day is a very good alternative.

## Organise your diary/schedule days off each week

Recent research indicates that a third of small business owners take ten days or less holidays each year, while 500,000 people admitted to working throughout the 2016 festive period, even on Christmas day. Scheduling in one day (or at least one evening) off each week unsurprisingly helps towards creating a healthier work-life balance, but also makes people more productive. We are just beginning to learn that quality, not quantity is best when it comes to hours worked each week. Another way to organise your week effectively can be to schedule prep days (for planning and preparation), focus days (for important, deadline driven tasks) as well as days off (that includes no checking of email) each week. Once you organise your working week this way, your brain can be at its best when it needs to be, whilst being recharged on the days off.

## Take more frequent holidays

Research shows that taking holidays has solid brain benefits, which need to be replenished often as it dissipates quickly on return to normal life. Leaving the country and going somewhere culturally different has the best effect on the brain.

As well as the brain benefits that these bring, there are a whole host of other benefits that come with take time away from work.

## You learn to let go

Handing over responsibility and leadership to other people is one of the best ways to allow your business to grow. While you're on holiday is a great time to start handing this over to others in your team to allow yourself a proper break from work. Using a SmartPA for your admin needs while you are away is a great way to hand over the reins to a safe pair of hands.

## You become exited again

After working 50 hour weeks for the last who knows how long, your enthusiasm for your business can start to wane. Once you start factoring in breaks and holidays into your working week, you will become more passionate about your projects and business and reminds you why you are doing the job or running the business in the first place.

## You can see the bigger picture

During these down times you are given the space to be able to reflect objectively on your business allowing yourself to see the bigger picture. You can assess what is going well, what is not going well and how to improve it (on your return).

## You become adept at using technology on-the-move

For the times when you absolutely must login and check emails or deal with an urgent issue while you're away, you may be surprised at the amount of technology available to help you work while on the move.

Smartphone tethering and mobile hotspots are a great way to connect to the internet if wifi isn't available.

Mobile phone chargers are great in remote locations or long journeys without the necessary cables or connections.

Using WhatsApp while you're away helps to avoid the cost of phone calls (if you're on wifi) and video calls as an alternative to Skype.

Before you go away, make sure you schedule your social media posts ahead of time so you don't need to do it while you're away. Using platforms such as Hootsuite or ActiveHosted make this task very easy and make your posts consistent even while you're away.

This summer, why don't you start arranging your diary to factor in breaks, or have someone do this for you, and make sure you get away for a week or two to properly recharge your brain, so you can return refreshed, re-energised and much more productive going forward?

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