

Summertime ME Time





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Use The Summer Months To Recharge Your Batteries And Excel At The Office

by Kenya McCullum

Summer is approaching and everything is starting to wind down. With its longer days, sunny skies, and warmer weather, children are getting out of school for the year and the buzz of activity in the office is not as deafening while people take vacations. This is the perfect time for administrative professionals to rejuvenate and have some precious “me time,” which is often so elusive during the rest of the year.

“One thing about admins is that they are extremely organized and they’re pretty much natural caregivers,” says June Sarbacker, the coordinator of the online administrative assistant program at Madison Area Technical College. “They want to make someone else look good, but they often don’t balance it with taking care of themselves and having some fun, so the summer is a good time for them to do that.”

There are several ways that you can enjoy some “me time” during the summer that can enrich you both professionally and personally, while getting you geared up for the flurry of activity that will return to your office in the fall.

Professional Development

The summer is a great time to learn new skills. Maybe you want to brush up on the latest and greatest software while you have more time to devote to using it. Maybe you want to take a public speaking course that can strengthen your communication skills at work. Or maybe you want to improve your prowess on the page by taking a creative writing class. Whatever you choose, investing in yourself by learning new things can give you a shot in the arm that prepares you for busier times during the year.

“The thing that happens when we invest in ourselves, which we so infrequently do, is that we get some perspective and reflective thinking that most of us don’t even do once a year,” says Nan Russell, consultant and author of *Hitting Your Stride: Your Work, Your Way*.

The summer is also an excellent time for admins to work on projects that they don’t have time to do the rest of the year— such as cleaning up files and e-mails or destroying unneeded records. And just as your company is preparing its goals for the new fiscal year, you can use this season to prepare your own personal goals as well. Have you been thinking about beginning a certification program at the local community college? During the summer, you’ll be less distracted and have the time to jump right in and pursue these kinds of activities.

If you need something more interesting to do than dusting off old files or organizing e-mails, you may consider volunteering for a committee at work that plans job-related events or charity functions. If there is something you feel passionately about, jumping in to volunteer can help you relax and explore your creative side.

“Being with a lot of creative people who are also in those committees gets you reconnected with who you are and you bring that feeling back to the workplace,” says Russell. Though doing this can be beneficial, Russell warns that you don’t necessarily have to run a committee to get something out of volun-

teerism. Just working on an event or program for one day can be rewarding and it connects you with your colleagues in a way that the regular work day does not.

Russell also recommends mentoring a new employee or intern to help you recharge during the summer months— which can include having a rookie shadow you for a day or a “take a new employee to lunch” program.

“It’s really hard not to get recharged again if you’re helping someone else,” says Russell. “It’s like refalling in love. If we remember why it is that we fell in love with our significant other in the first place, and we’re reminded of that, it helps us get refocused. Likewise, when that newbie is asking lots of questions about what it’s like to work at your company, it helps keep it in perspective for you. We get a different understanding about our own relationship to our work that way.”

Personal Growth

Although engaging in professional development activities is important, don’t forget that the summer should be about fun and games too. And the fun thing that we don’t do nearly enough of is taking a real vacation— not a day or two off here and there until all your time has been exhausted. Human resources consultant Susan Heathfield, who writes the Human Resources guide on About.com (humanresources.about.com), says that you should take an ample amount of time off to allow you the opportunity to really unwind.

“The minimum amount of time an employee should actually take for a vacation is two weeks. The first week you barely have time to come down

from working, then you have a couple of days where you’re actually on vacation and then you’re back into anticipation of going back to work. That doesn’t give you a lot of down time,” says Heathfield, who also believes that a good vacation is when you get away for a while.

“A change in scenery is really good for people,” she adds. “Whether you rent a cottage for a week or catch up on your reading, just try to do stuff for yourself during the time that you’re not at work.” In fact, the further away you go from the office, the less likely it is that you’re going to spend your vacation thinking about work.

And if you’re going away for a few weeks, be sure not to worry about what’s going on in the office while you’re gone. Heathfield points out that one of the reasons why we aren’t taking our vacations as we should is because we erroneously believe that if we’re out of sight, we’ll be out of mind and it may have a detrimental effect on our position at work.

“Many of us have way too much of our psyche wrapped up in what we do and I think it’s partly because we’re delusional,” she adds. “Work does not need us as badly as we think it does. While most of us would definitely be missed, I think it’s quite amazing that you can be away for a vacation and how little has changed when you get back.”

And once you’re back from vacation, there are other activities that you can engage in that will keep you relaxed long after you’ve unpacked your bags.

Get some exercise. We all say that we’re going to incorporate physical activity into our daily routines, but somehow we rarely ever do. And don’t

think that you need to join a local gym to get more fit— remember that walking with a friend in the morning or even taking your dog on a long walk after work can give you a head start on the road to wellness. And when you do begin an exercise regime, keep in mind that the first couple of weeks are always the hardest, as it takes about 21 days to change a habit.

Read a book. Getting lost in a book can teach you something new or just help you escape from reality for a few hours. Also, joining a book group can expand your social circle while sharing new ideas that keep you mentally stimulated.

Tiny motivators. Keeping a book of inspiring quotations at your desk and reading one daily can feed your soul and help you in every area of your life— especially on the days when you are feeling less than motivated.

It doesn't necessarily matter what strategy you choose to reinvigorate yourself this summer— just that you remember to take some "me time." You can't continue to do a good job at taking care of everybody else's needs on the job if you don't take good care of your own. So, this summer, remember that it's all about you.

About the author:

Kenya McCullum is a freelance writer based in San Francisco whose work can be found at www.km-com.com. One way that she relaxes during the summer is by writing a blog about offbeat news at www.uselessonline.com.

