

HOLIDAY TIME: A PROVEN PRESCRIPTION FOR A STRONGER YOU

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The sleep-count is officially on. But sadly, not a happy one.

In just a matter of days the midyear holiday period will be coming to an end. The lazy, hazy, crazy days to the western hemisphere summer will be starting to cool, hours of sunlight lessening, evening airs chilling, tree leaves bronzing. And soon, once again, school bells will be ringing.

Such is the bittersweetness of the arrivals of September in much of the world. An otherwise pretty month of changing of the seasons, the arrivals of the ninth month of the calendar year represents and end to an extended time of play – the holidays.

Holiday time has, historically, been seen as a novelty, even an indulgence – playtime, focus on together-time comes to a close, time spent on long-awaited travels near or abroad, or it may be time happily right here at home. Time focusing on thoughtfully prepared 'to-do for me' and/or 'for us' lists, or time spent doing nothing in particular. However spent, it is hours and hours, day after day, doing what one's heart desired. Because that is what holidays are for.

HOLIDAYS FOR HEALTH

Increasingly, however, as daily pressures are made more intense by the omnipresence of technology in our lives, with unpausable and unmutable work-related demands are just a ping away, holiday time has become more a necessity than a novelty. Directly linked to wellbeing, holiday time, is viewed in a very black and white way: it is essential for people's health and wellbeing.

To work through a calendar year with no breaks, no to switch off, to switch focus from the external to the internal, to simply be still, is now recognized as a vital part of physical, psychological, and spiritual health. It is too easy to slip into the '*because I have to*' feeling of responsibility and often hypnotic, hyper-attentive rhythm, of work. In so many ways, what one does has become the dominant part of who they are. Hitting that pause button, the wholeness of the person suddenly shines through.

As does the deprivation of focus on one's holistic wellbeing. Just because the CV and bank statement are in balance, does not mean the body, mind and spirit are. Nor the health of relationships held most dear, yet dearly deprived of quality time as, time and again, something at work gets in the way.

In some parts of the world holiday time off is institutionalised, while in others it is still a lean part of an employment package. With European nations enjoying paid leave of 30+ days across the continent, Austria and Portugal tied at the forefront with 35 days per annum, cross-continent, European businesses are assumed to shut down in August, whether they do or not. If it's August, it means 'Out of Office' responses.

Yet in other parts of the world, to take leave is felt to be to take a risk. Looking more closely at the behaviour of Americans with regard to usage of holiday allocations (already some of the fewest days of paid leave in the world with an allocation starting at only 10 days), Arianna Huffington is clearly aghast when examining the outcomes of a study by the US Travel Association.:

“All too many of us could be on vacation but choose not to. The study found that 40 percent of American workers will leave paid vacation days unused. Even more revealing are the reasons respondents gave for leaving paid time off on the table. The four reasons cited the most are the dread of returning from a vacation to piles of work (40 percent), the belief that no one will be able to step in and do their job for them while they’re gone (35 percent), not being able to afford it (33 percent) and the fear of being seen as replaceable (22 percent).”

SEEING THE RISKS OF NO HOLIDAY TIME

Surely this ‘work martyr’ (a term frequently used by Roger Dow, President and CEO of US Travel Association, and one of the global travel industry’s greatest and most admired champions for the economic and social benefits of travel and tourism) syndrome has its impact at a business level. Indeed, it does. In the US the risks of being a holiday martyr are not just recognized, they are quantified, in terms of overall productivity. The World Health Organisation estimates that stress costs American businesses +/- US\$ 300 billion per annum, and sleep deprivation a further US\$ 63 billion. And that is in the US alone.

Clearly there is something more to this forced time off than simply escaping the midday heat of the middle of the year.

THIS is where the need, the overt necessity of holidays come in.

And within that, the invaluable role of travel – the ability to get away to get closer to what really matters. It is not purely about selfish me-time. Holidays are a platform for reconnecting with what keeps one whole – the people they love, the things that really matter, the parts of their identity and individuality that keep them grounded, centered, real.

The ability to escape the often self-inflicted pressures and split-personalities of every day’s tugging of professional and personal personas, the ability to just switch off, literally and figuratively, and just allow the true you to rise to the surface, in whatever colours it chooses to reveal, is a part of wellness we so often compromise in value.

Importantly, it goes beyond personal wellbeing. It impacts the whole family, as perfectly captured by the message heart-pokingly conveyed by Mastercard’s ‘one More Day’ campaign of 2014 which used kids to convey the message that time together, real time off, matters.

<http://newsroom.mastercard.com/videos/mastercard-tv-commercial-onemoreday/>

PERSONAL REBOOT

The bottom line: when it comes to investing in oneself – physically, emotionally, individually, as a member of a family, as a friend, as a colleague, as a member of society, there is no greater one can make than in ‘me-time’. Indulgent?

Quite the contrary. Essential.

Because you need it, you deserve it.

And because you can.

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