

It's the Holidays and They're Hard at Work

More than half of Canadian executives work while on vacation

By Ron Miller

If you plan to celebrate this festive season, spare a thought for your boss. Rather than taking the opportunity to forget the office and relax spending time with loved ones, executives will be checking e-mail and taking care of the business. In a recent survey, half of Canadian executives said they attend to office duties at least a few times a week while on vacation.

The survey of 100 senior executives in Canada, conducted on behalf of staffing service Office Team, found that 13 per cent of managers work every day while on vacation. And a whopping 37 per cent work a few times a week. Twenty-nine per cent rarely work and only 21 per cent of executive polled responded that they never work while on vacation.

"Executives may find it difficult to completely disconnect from their jobs as they often have a wide range of responsibilities and few people who can assume their duties while they're away," said Diane Domeyer, executive director of OfficeTeam.

"Advances in technology make it possible to stay connected to the office 24/7, but everyone needs time to recharge or they may return from their breaks as weary as when they left," she added.

Here are five tips for taking the "work" out of vacations:

1. Time it right. If possible, schedule a break during a traditionally calm time in your office. For example, the last week of December might be quieter than usual because clients and customers also may be taking time off. Submit vacation requests early to secure your desired dates.
2. Get the word out. Tell clients and customers about your holiday plans and provide the names of team members to contact in your absence. Use your e-mail's out-of-office function to let people know you're away.
3. Assign a decision-maker. Designate someone whose judgment you trust to make decisions while you're on vacation. Let that person know where key information is kept and how your files are organized.
4. Unplug. While it's tempting to bring your laptop or PDA with you consider leaving these devices at home unless absolutely necessary. If you bring them, leave them in your room and check them only periodically.
5. Establish office hours. If you must check in with the office, plan ahead. Provide your team with the days and times you'll be checking messages so you can avoid interruptions or the feeling that you're "on call."

Ron Miller is a freelance writer and regular contributor to magazines including Canadian HR Reporter and Canadian Business.