

Preparing for vacation is hard work

By Alice Bredin
Tribune Media

I am preparing for a vacation, two weeks of bliss away from the day-to-day pressures of running my business, making decisions and juggling my personal and professional life under one roof. Part of me thinks it's the best part of the preparation for it is killing me.

Vacation preparation is not simple when you run a home-based business. Film for the camera and sunbather are minor concerns compared with letting clients know you won't be available, arranging for your phone calls and e-mail messages to be handled, planning for bill payment and invoicing while you are away, and taking care of security of your

home and your office. It is much simpler to plan for vacation when you work in a traditional office because you don't have to worry about who will turn on the alarm, system or accept packages for you. You also don't have to think to remind your assistant to run the dishwasher every few days so the coffee and tea cups are clean, the office trash can is full, and the office door is locked.

If you are planning a trip this summer, my advice to you is to start preparing well ahead of time. A few weeks before you leave, write down all of the tasks you take care of without thinking about it, like pulling down shades in your office to make sure your equipment doesn't get too much sun, emptying the trash can in the bathroom employees use, and lock-

ing windows and doors at the end of the day.

To help you make your list, I will share with you some of the items on my home office preparation list. If you think of anything I have forgotten, please e-mail me ASAP!

Security is a big issue for home-based business owners who go on vacation. You have to let people know you are out of the office for an extended period and will probably need to publicize this on your answering machine. By doing this, you create a security risk for your home and your office. We are solving the problem by having a house sitter. Another option is to have friends or family come to your house periodically and bring in mail, turn lights on and generally create an aura of habitation in the house.

In addition to having someone watch your house, it is a good idea to have someone check your home office, take messages off of your machine so it doesn't fill up, add paper to your fax machine, collect packages before they are sent back to the sender because they cannot be delivered and handle other office maintenance items. You can do this for a colleague; they reciprocate when you go away.

Arrange to have an automatic response go out from your e-mail whenever someone sends you a message. The response tells people you are out of town and will return their message when you are back in the office. This is a courtesy that lets people know why you have not responded. If your e-mail provider doesn't offer this service, give your password to a friend,

assistant or associate, and ask them to cut and paste a message to this effect in replies to e-mails you receive while you are away.

To minimize the upheaval you will experience upon your return, ask a trusted associate to scan your mail for bills, checks; letters from the Internal Revenue Service and other important documents that arrive while you are away. Pay this person for their time, and have them get rid of junk mail, write checks and organize your mail so you do not come back to a huge mess.

If you have employees in your home office, designate someone to keep the kitchen clean, get milk for coffee, empty trash cans and run the dishwasher periodically so the kitchen stays clean while you are away.

If employees need to get in to work while you are away, don't forget to give them keys. It is easy to overlook this item if you are used to being in the office whenever they arrive.

Of course, notify key clients that you will be out of town. When appropriate, identify a colleague who they can call in an emergency to answer questions on projects you have already completed.

Alice Bredin is author of the "Virtual Office Survival Handbook" (John Wiley & Sons) and host of The American Express Small Business Exchange Web site: <http://usua.americanexpress.com>. You can write to her at Tribune Media Services, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611, or e-mail her at BredinA@aol.com.

Job anxiety creates a cycle of failure

By Lindsey Novak
Tribune Media

Q: This is my first year working after graduating college. What is the most important thing I should do in the workplace if I really care about advancing and succeeding, no matter where I work?

A: There are three crucial requirements and, depending on your company's culture, not necessarily in this order:

- Be smart (stay abreast in your field).
- Give 100 percent of yourself (this does not mean to be a workaholic, but rather, take your work seriously).
- Schmooze with the "right" people. This does not mean to be a snob or a superficial brown-

nooser, but be smart about those with whom you associate. Employees are often "pegged" in the beginning according to how they dress, whom they befriend and how they present themselves. Once management decides what type you are, it's very hard to break out of that image, especially if it affects moving up on the ladder.

DON'T ANSWER QUESTIONS THAT ARE NOT ASKED

Q: I was recently hired for a great job after being fired at my previous job for a misunderstanding. When I interviewed, one asked me I left my last job, though it was clear on my resume that I no longer worked for my previous employer. On the

job now, people have asked me questions about how I felt about saying good-bye to co-workers, which leads me to believe they were not notified I was unemployed when they hired me. I have never lied about the past, but what am I obligated to say?

A: If your resume showed the correct employment dates for your prior job, and you have never lied about anything, there's no reason to announce what happened there without being asked. They may have overlooked that you were let go, but fortunately, your past employer notified you professionally and did nothing to destroy your reputation. Questions like, "How did it feel to say good-bye?" could apply to any type of termination.

If, at a later date, they realize they had overlooked that fact and ask you why you didn't say anything, point to the employer's omission on your resume to show them you never did anything to hide it.

LONER WILL HAVE TO DEAL WITH CO-WORKERS' OSTRACISM

Q: I have been in my job for only a few months and do not get along well with my co-workers. From the first week, they openly displayed their hostility and I have had to defend every action I make - not taking lunch, not attending social functions, etc. They even criticize me at meetings, which causes supervisors to give me skeptical looks.

My performance record has increased sales by 500 percent and I have received excellent client evaluations. I'd like to get out of attending an out-of-town business function because there will be recreational exchanges as well. What can I say to not get

A: A certain amount of socializing in the workplace is important, even if your performance is outstanding. Review your introductions and beginning conversations with co-workers to see why they are so antagonistic. If only one employee reacts negatively to a new co-worker, the problem generally lies with that employee. If an entire group responds negatively, the problem may be in your ability to assimilate to the group.

Loners are often mistaken as arrogant, which could cause instant dislike among co-workers. More people are fired due to personality clashes than incompetence, so you may have to change your attitude about socializing if you want to succeed. If you have previously experienced difficulty socializing in a work setting, consider seeking counseling, group therapy or joining a group such as Toastmaster's to overcome this problem.

Having problems on the job? Write to Lindsey Novak in care of Tribune Media Services, Inc., 435 N. Michigan Ave., Suite 1800, Chicago, Ill. 60611. She can also be contacted at ALNovak@aol.com.

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