



HERE'S A SECRET ...

We Can Vacation, Unapologetically

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I looked left, then right, and then left again. A bead of sweat formed on my temple as my pupils dilated. What insurmountable fire-breathing dragon and razor-wire wall separating diametric opposites was I trying to resolve with my decision-fatigued brain this day? On one side was my laptop and the pack of cords, adapters, and extra plugs needed to operate it. On the other was a bag packed full of shorts, breezy tops, pleasure reading, and a pair of purple sunglasses. So basically, just a veterinarian trying to get on vacation.

As a profession, and as an industry, we really suck at taking vacation time. We answer emails on the beach, take consults waiting in line at amusement parks, and hide at the edge of our kid's sporting events on Zoom meetings. Studies show that over half of Americans don't take all of their allotted vacation time. In fact, more than half take less than half of their allotted time off per year.¹ We worry about not being seen as a team player, returning to work that has piled up in our absence, or being penalized in some nebulous way. We worrywart perfectionists feel obligated to offer the best of ourselves to our jobs, but we are really doing our patients, our clients, our colleagues, and, most importantly, ourselves a disservice.

There is, in fact, plenty of research to support the benefits of regular time away from work. Studies show that regular vacationers can reduce their risk of heart disease by over 30% and their risk of death by 20%.² Women who take vacation twice a year are 8 times less likely to have a heart attack than women who only vacation once every 6 years.³ Other studies have shown an increase in sales performance of 37%, and harder-to-measure attributes like creativity and positivity also improve.⁴ Workers who take vacations are 6.5% more likely to be promoted or get raises.⁵ And while veterinary medicine is special, we aren't any different; production-based salaries can be supported, even boosted, by vacation.

I stopped the panic and talked with a coworker to set up plans for any tasks to be handled in a way that benefitted my team and allowed me to truly disengage. In the end, I packed the computer (I was traveling during the time of COVID-19, after all), but I plopped it into my hotel safe as an insurance policy, where it stayed powered down, my vacation security blanket.

When I returned, I realized the dragon was really just a mildly cranky hamster, the razor wire was just a needle on a flush syringe I forgot to recap, and the wall was a boundary—my boundary. It is the one I set and could change however I wanted to in whatever way worked best for me. So happy staycation, road trip, camping adventure, or world travel, my friends. Please get out there and get lost from work for a bit. **TVP**



To see the references for this article, please visit todaysveterinarypractice.com.

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This column is titled "The Secret Life Vets" so I can talk about the secrets that really should be considered well-known truths. These are the not-so-secret secrets that can help change our thinking and our profession for the better.



Ben Kirchner