

Maximizing Results Through People
A CEO To CEO Quarterly Newsletter
8-15-02
Ah, Vacation

Dear Fellow CEO:

For most of us, the last 18 months have been challenging at best and frequently downright difficult. The recession hit BWA in March of 2001 and we're not totally out of the woods yet. That, in and of itself, has been brutal. Then came 9/11. Each person in our organization has had to deal with that national pain and the day-to-day reality of the ongoing terrorist war in which we're embroiled. On top of that came the stock market meltdown. Oh boy. These three events have not built corporate optimism – in me or anyone else. Nonetheless, I'm supposed to lead, so I've gotten up every morning and done my best.

But, that's not all – there are other things closer to home that add to the challenge. There have been the regular day-to-day travails of running a business: people becoming disengaged from their work for unknown reasons, hires not working out, losing excellent clients, working through challenges with vendors. This running a business thing isn't all the stock options and Lear jets we've been led to believe.

I don't know about you, but when things get bad, I tend to hunker down and work harder. I've tried to follow my own advice by communicating positively and openly to try to build and / or retain enthusiasm in others. That's hard work, but I've tried to do it. Meanwhile, my own enthusiasm has waned. As the pressures mount, I respond by trying to do more, to make it all work. While working to maintain a positive outlook on the business front, it's much harder to do on the home front. I know I haven't been as positive, even as communicative, as I should be. I'm gone more and home less.

I've always viewed vacation as essential. Indeed, our values statement reflecting that sentiment says, "We recognize that life should be a balance between work and play," attempting to codify the need for time off to relax and refresh. Since starting the business, I have tried to take off a few days at least every quarter to do just that. Each time I do, I come back revitalized and more than ready to attack the day-to-day business challenges.

But since a planned trip with my middle son Brandon last summer, I've worked instead. I couldn't spare the time. No vacation. Fall break, I worked. Yes, we took a couple of days off for Christmas and New Years, but mostly, I tried to clean the books up to close them for the year. Spring break, I worked. It had been a full year since my last vacation, and I know my mind and body had both been yearning for a break.

Ah, Vacation!

Beginning July 3rd, we took an extended (due to the 4th of July holiday) 2 week driving trip with our two younger boys to Nova Scotia via Quebec City and home via Bar Harbor and the Pocono's. Nothing fancy, just a couple of weeks of family fun (an e-mail with pictures will not follow, don't worry).

Ah, Vacation!

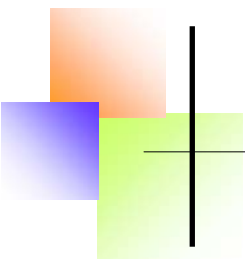
It took about four or five days to start to get into relaxation mode. I could feel the stress peel off in layers, like an onion. After about the first week, I didn't automatically get up before 6:00 am to look for something to do. Some days I even slept until 9:00am. I read 4 books, saw a lot of country, played tennis, racquetball, cards, swam – had a vacation. Dana and the boys marveled that some days we didn't even have an agenda.

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We got home Sunday afternoon the 21st of July, and yes, I did go to the office for a few hours to see what had stacked up on my desk. The amazing fact though, was that when I came to work Monday morning, I was excited to work. I was optimistic in a way that I hadn't felt before. I was revived, rejuvenated, excited and committed.

I needed a vacation, I took one and it did exactly what vacation is supposed to do.

Now, the important thing is to start planning the next one. Soon.

As business leaders, we tend to dive into our work, thrive in its challenges and relish all of the opportunities presented to us to test our mettle. That's great when things are going well. When they're not, we fight and push harder, taking the losses and difficulties personally. The quest for victory (at least for me) can become obsessive and when it's not forthcoming, you try harder. And harder again. Vacation time doesn't fit into that downward spiral and that's a mistake. It must.

Ah, vacation.

I wanted to take this opportunity to remind all of you to take some time and enjoy the summer and your family. It will be good for everybody, including you. And be sure to remind your employees to do the same thing.

Thanks for listening.
Sincerely,

Robert S. Wilson, President
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