



## Taking Time Off— Are You Treating Your Practice as a Sprint or a Cross-Country Race?

Getting away from the office is a necessity and not a luxury, according to this law firm

**U**ndoubtedly, the key to success in our profession is hard work, but through the years, my law partner **Fred Granade** and I have observed the impact of overwork on older lawyers we both admire.

We have watched some lawyers slowly replace all of their hobbies with work. When these lawyers become unable to practice law due to their age or medical condition, they sometimes experience extended periods of depression.

Fred and I both acknowledged that during the past 27 years of practicing, our concept of self-worth has been integrally tied to our production as lawyers. To help create a balance between our professional and personal lives, the shareholders in our firm hold each other accountable in taking off time, and we implemented the following policies to require our lawyers to take extended vacations:

### ***Rotating Sabbatical***

In addition to regular vacations and holidays, we rotate a six-week sabbatical among the shareholders in the firm, with one shareholder taking the paid sabbatical each year. We require that the sabbatical period be six consecutive weeks, making it easier for the other lawyers to plan for the absence of the shareholder. Some lawyers do an excellent job of taking advantage of the sabbatical, while others get pulled back into the office too easily.

As a result of these sabbaticals, all of the shareholders have realized that our firm can function fine without any one of us for at least a six-week period. Knowing that none of us is indispensable has resulted in a healthy bruising of each of our egos.

### ***Month Off for Lawyers with 20 Years of Service***

If a lawyer remains in continuous, full-time service with the firm for 20 years, the lawyer receives, in addition to his

or her holidays and vacations, a one-month paid vacation each year for as long as he or she is in full-time, active law practice. The one-month period consists of four consecutive weeks off and is received by each of the senior lawyers each year, except in the senior lawyer's sabbatical year.

After taking off time, we return refreshed and with a renewed commitment to the practice. Also, we have developed more interests and hobbies away from the office. In my case, learning to take time off without feeling guilty was like learning to hit a golf ball or throw a cast net. I did not do it very well at first, but I am getting better each year.

On a lighter note, when my wife learned the firm implemented a policy allowing me a month out of the office each year, her response was, "Why would they do a silly thing like that? What am I going to do with you?"

The following list was compiled by our shareholders for successful sabbaticals:

- Schedule the sabbatical as soon as possible and fight to keep the time free.
- Arrange to have the other lawyers in the firm cover your work in progress, hearings and client communications.
- Write down a schedule of what you plan to do on the sabbatical. If you memorialize it in writing, you are more likely to do it.
- Learn what your spouse wants to do on the sabbatical.
- Take a trip out of state on the first day of your sabbatical. This puts you out of touch with the office and breaks your routine.
- Have the staff ask clients if the matter can wait until you get back; if not, refer the matter to another lawyer in the law firm.
- Distinguish between real and perceived client crises.
- Include prayer time and exercise time each day of the sabbatical.

—*Samuel N. Crosby, Daphne*