

Wanna Get Away?



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In this, our annual themed issue on making your law firm an extraordinary place to work, we typically – and understandably – focus on strategies for accomplishing that in your organization. This edition is no exception, as we discuss topics ranging from the value of mentoring initiatives and lawyer assistance programs to the importance of achieving inclusiveness in the workplace.

I'd like to discuss a topic, however, that has nothing to do with being "at work" – yet it's essential to making your organization a great place to work. It's called *vacation*. Yes, that's right: For your firm to thrive, everyone you employ has to get out of the office and forget about work for a while.

In my 15-plus years as a journalist, I've had a very hard time disconnecting from my job. My "vacations" tend to be long weekends, or a few days away during which I'm still checking email, editing stories during plane flights, etc. This year, however, I planned several months in advance for an eight-day trip to Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. The official occasion was the wedding of two dear friends, but I also knew that, for me, the occasion represented a rare opportunity to go completely "off the grid" and discover ... *something*.

Thanks to the encouragement of my boss – as I was leaving for the trip, she hollered down the hall, "Don't take your laptop!" – and my own over-planning (i.e., detailed instructions for colleagues) so I wouldn't be worried about things, I embarked for "PCDR" ready for essentially anything that did *not* involve everyday life at home or the office.

So, what did I discover? For starters, I learned that you *can* experience your own Corona beer TV commercial – you know, the ones that show people sitting on the beach staring into the ocean. Even better: I quickly learned that the resort at which I stayed had *king-size beds on the beach*. You can just hop up, lie down, stare at the sea and listen to the waves crashing ashore. I did that quite a bit, and it was very therapeutic. (And check out my view in the photo above! Nice, huh?) I actually fell asleep out there one evening. I could not have been further away mentally from real life. In a word: *Paradise*.

I discovered a few other things, too: I like Dominican beer, sleeping more than five hours a night is refreshing, I'm a decent beach volleyball player and – get this – ALA was still chugging right along when I got back! The Association did not collapse because I was gone for a week and not checking my email.

It seems counterintuitive, but encouraging your employees – yes, even your billable-hour people – to go on vacation and "get disconnected" makes your firm a better place to work and ultimately motivates people to work harder when they return. When I returned to ALA, colleagues kept stopping me in the hall – "You're so tan!" "You have facial hair!" "You look so refreshed!" – and, indeed, all of those things were true. But, more importantly, I felt re-energized and glad to have the great job I have. I feel like I've worked harder – and mostly happier – in the past three weeks than in the prior three years. Being able to take the time off reminded me why this is a cool place to work.

Wanna get away? Make it happen and reap the rewards.

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Beds on the beach – Excellence Punta Cana Resort, Dominican Republic ... admit it, you want to go away now, don't you?