

COMMENTARY

There are ways to avoid the post-vacation blues

Your summer vacation is ending. For days it was all blue sky and clear blue sea.

You return home and the first day back, what happens? You have a stack of messages on your desk. Your mail is 8 inches high. There are papers, memos, and announcements all over the place.

By 10 a.m. the benefits of your vacation are all but negated. What happened? You've been hit by the post-vacation slam.

On that first day back, and often the second, you can experience extreme pressure to catch up. The same thing can occur when you're on

an overnight trip or out of the office all day. The moment you return, the whole world falls in on you.

Why Does This Keep Happening? Our lives have not been eased by the "Age of Information" because that age has not yet truly come. We are in a transition time between the Industrial Age and the Information Age. Whereas the Information Age has not yet arrived, the over-information era is here in full bloom.

One of the realities of our era is the overabundance of information, which contributes to a feeling of being time-pressed and more stressed than ever before. I can safely surmise that you currently are inundated with more information than you know how to handle, even in the village of Chapel Hill. The impact becomes acute when you return from a vacation or simply a day away from your normal routine.

Consider the "harbingers" of the

Information Age: the Internet and WorldWideWeb. These services can drop more information on you in a few hours than the individuals at any other time in history experienced in their entire lives.

Such a glut of information overwhelms us and leaves us with a feeling of stress and/or helplessness. The clearest sign that we're not fully in the Information Age is that we are still being more burdened than benefited by the flow of information that is inundating us.

Examine an invention from the Industrial Age: the electric light. It is quite complicated, involving circuits, wattage and breakers. Most of us don't know exactly how it works and, indeed, we don't need to; all we have to do is flip a switch or press a button and it works for us. We're able to get what we want — light — easily and without even thinking about it. It is something that has improved the quality of our lives. Once we are able to say this about our information servers, we shall

know that the Information Age has truly come.

Meanwhile, the overabundance of information insidiously robs us of our time, second by second, minute by minute. More information has led to more regulation, more forms to fill out, and more things to do. Every time you leave your desk, it's guaranteed that you'll return to face more phone, fax and e-mail messages; more forms to complete, more catalogs, and more correspondence in general.

For now, life will remain complex. Thus it becomes essential to both safeguard your vacation time and your return procedure so that you don't get hit by the post-vacation slam.

I speak professionally to all types of businesses and associations around the country. When doing so, I suggest planning vacations so that you return one day or at least a half day before you told everybody you would return. This enables you to include a "decompression" phase in

your plans; your trip is not complete until you comfortably re-integrate yourself into your home and office routines.

You are far better building in some decompression than coming back too abruptly.

Before you leave, to the degree that you can, instruct others hereafter to filter, reroute, or handle as many phone calls as possible; and, based on instructions, to segment your important, urgent and interesting accumulations. Return to a clean office, a clean desk, a clean home and a clean car. Give yourself the best chance to get back into your routine. Recognize that the over-information era will be here for a while, and that you deserve all the breathing space you can get.

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MY VIEW



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