



Time Out: How to Prepare for Time Away from the Office

By Lynzie Nebel

“There’s nothing we can’t do if we work hard, never sleep, and shirk all other responsibilities in our lives” - Leslie Knope

At some point you’re going to need to take more than a day or two off of work. It might be for a vacation, it might be for parental leave, or it might be for something you didn’t plan on like sick relative or an accident. Obviously the unplanned absences are harder to prepare for (unless you have a solid Magic 8 Ball on your side), but there are a few things you could do so you don’t leave your company in the lurch should that type of situation come up. Here are some of the ways you can be prepared to take off, whatever the situation may be.

1. If this is a planned leave, talk to your boss as soon as you can. You want to make sure there’s someone who can cover your work. Sometimes your boss will try to hire someone on a temporary basis to help cover some of your tasks.
2. Take one week to write down every little thing you do. Keep a small notebook on you or use a notes app, and write down everything you do as you do it each day. Even if you’re doing something small or seemingly unimportant, keep track. You can always delete those tasks later. Then, at the end of the week, take a look at the list and see if any of those items have work instructions already written for them. If they do, you’ve got an easy-to-make-instruction manual for your time out.
3. If there are daily or weekly tasks you don’t have work instructions for, then take the time to jot down the steps necessary. It also doesn’t hurt if you can walk someone reliable through these tasks so they have an idea of what they need to do.

4. I’m a big fan of leaving a “master email” and copying anyone who could possibly be covering for you. In that email, you should include the tasks you do in a week, with the corresponding work instructions and the quick notes on any of the undocumented tasks. The email should also include an active project list and the current status and potential future status of those projects.
5. Make sure you’ve spoken to someone about being your main backup person while you’re out. Direct people to this person in your out-of-office message.
6. Leave and try not to stress. I know that can be easier said than done sometimes, but rest assured, your company can manage without you for a bit. Yeah, there might be a pile for you to come back to, but it’s important that you take the time off for its intended purpose. It’ll be okay.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lynzie Nebel is SPE’s VP-Young Professionals and a Plastics Engineer at Tech Tank. She graduated from Penn State-Erie with a B.S. in Plastics & Polymer Engineering Technology/Technician. She lives in Pennsylvania with her husband, Daniel, sons, Henry Ulysses and Samuel Clarence, and 2 very fat ginger cats-Richard Dreyfuss & Ralphie Templeton.

