

Job Hunting During the Vacation Season - A Good Move?

Question:

I am seriously contemplating leaving my firm and am just beginning the search process. Now we are into "vacation season," and I don't know whether to take my vacation as planned or use the time for potential interviews in the future. And how will it look if I take a vacation and then give notice a few weeks later?

Answer:

First, bravo for planning to take a vacation! In some big firms planning an absence for more than four to five days can be perceived as disloyal or somewhat irresponsible. The topic of how lawyers take or don't take vacations deserves an essay in itself.[Read that essay here.](#)

Once, after practicing for three years with very little time off, I planned a 16-day vacation out of the lower 48. I had a hard time with guilt and foreboding as I blocked the time out. [As the date approached to take off, my anxiety hit the red zone.](#) It didn't help that the week before my vacation, more than a few of my colleagues stopped by my office to express sorrow that I was leaving the firm.

"I'm not leaving the firm," I said.

"But no one would go away for two weeks unless they planned to quit soon after their return."

"I don't plan to quit."

Their puzzled looks only heightened my fear that I might be shooting myself in the foot. My primary supervising attorney wasn't thrilled. We had a few terse interchanges about deadlines and my current billable-hours status, both of which were under control. By the time I left on vacation, I had resolved that if this vacation cost me my job, it was a bridge I had to cross.

The result was unexpected. Two weeks in the wilderness really cleaned out the cobwebs. It had been more than six years since I had last escaped civilization and seen the world through a broader lens. That time away from the firm sowed seeds of doubt about how I was balancing my time (or not). That overdue vacation actually started me down a path that led to leaving my firm. But it didn't have anything to do with my firm's reaction, just mine.

Surprisingly, when I returned I was greeted with open arms and enthusiasm to "hear all about it," and I was able to pick up fairly easily from where I left off. I smiled to myself when my supervisor planned a vacation to the same spot the following year. And others began to block out time.

One of the named partners used to give a talk once a year that included the importance of taking vacations. We all wanted to believe him, but the competitive atmosphere and the pivotal review periods created an internal culture that equated daily presence and access with loyalty and sacrifice for the firm. Most of us didn't want to risk that impression.

So how do you add a job hunt to a scenario that might already be a little tricky? First, you do what all the books tell you about basic planning. Plan your vacation way ahead of time. Put it in all pertinent shared calendars. Work ahead on deadlines. Anticipate your plan for coverage. You may need different people to cover different things. Have a backup system for your backups. Communicate well with the colleagues and clients you work with on a frequent basis. If you are a litigator and your work demands can suddenly

materialize with little notice, have some flexibility in your plans.

Most importantly, adopt the right attitude. While you are speaking to people about your plans for coverage or working late to clear deadlines the weeks before, it doesn't hurt if you have a goofy smile on your face and you communicate your excitement about what you have planned. Guilt and fear and anxiety about taking a vacation can be a communicable disease. Fortunately, a joyous attitude that reflects a balanced dedication to the firm and to taking care of you can also spread from person to person. You are not only taking care of yourself, you may be giving someone else permission by example to care for himself or herself as well.

Assuming you have a well-planned vacation on the books, unless there are exceptional circumstances, I would advise you not to change your plans. A job search is inherently unpredictable, especially in this market. There are no guarantees of interviews or offers. If you do get a request for an interview, you may be able to fold it into your vacation time. Or if a firm wants you to fly cross-country the week you return from vacation, most firms will work to find a time on a Monday or Friday.

Recruiting staff understand schedules and the demands on attorneys. Do keep your recruiter updated on your location. There is nothing more frustrating than to have netted the extremely hard-to-get interview only to find the candidate is out of the country when the key partner is available.

And if you are lucky enough to receive the perfect offer two weeks after you return from vacation, show some sensitivity in negotiating a stop date. Err on the side of helping your old firm even if you may be a bit compromised yourself for a few days. Treat people well, including yourself, and it's more than possible to find a great new job, have a vacation, and leave your old firm in their good graces.

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