

## **Ask SCORE**

*I've operated a local convenience store for almost seven years, never taking off more than an occasional weekend or holiday. Every time I plan a vacation, something comes up. How do I break this pattern before I burn out?*

Among the many incentives for starting a small business is the ability to gain more freedom over your life. When and how long you work are your decisions, not someone else's. And your reward is more than a paycheck; it's the opportunity to watch something special grow and thrive.

But for many small business owners, this "freedom" soon evolves from routine to rut that's not easy to escape. A sense of responsibility is inherent in being the boss. But some people are afraid to take even a short vacation from their firms. They fear that something will go wrong or they'll miss out on that next big opportunity.

According to the American Express OPEN Vacation Monitor, less than half of 500 small business owners surveyed planned to take any kind of summer vacation in 2011. That's down from 65% in 2006. And since 79% of employees carried a computer or other work-related device with them on vacation, it's a good bet bosses like you did as well.

Dedication to your small business is important, but so too is settling limits on how far it governs your life. Entrepreneurs are at their best when they're well-rested, focused, physically healthy, and can step out of that leadership role for a while to just be themselves. And it's not all that hard to do.

For example, taking your own "mental health" day will go a long way toward recharging your internal batteries. And because you're the boss, you don't have to make up any excuses.

If you want to get away for an extended period, brief those in charge on the possibilities and chief concerns of each customer. Tell key clients or customers in advance of any extended time away you are planning. Introduce your stand-ins and express your confidence in their ability to handle any issues that may arise. You should be looking to delegate tasks to others at your business anyway, so that you can cultivate a cadre of leaders to support your small business as it grows.

And don't think of "time off" solely in terms of multi-day vacations. Designate certain hours or days as "your time" and prohibit yourself from checking email, browsing your business websites or answering the phone. Also build exercise into your daily routine, even if it's just a walk around the block at lunchtime. And eat right; a balanced diet with do wonders for your alertness. And healthy meals really do taste good.

*This column is brought to you by the Merrimack Valley Chapter of SCORE, with nearly 70 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business mentoring and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit [merrimackvalley.score.org](http://merrimackvalley.score.org) for information on mentoring, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.*