

You're Sabotaging Yourself at Work—Here's How

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Gossiping with co-workers about your boss or checking Facebook on your work computer? Definitely not recommended—but chances are you're making an even bigger on-the-job mistake: letting several of your vacation days go unused.

See, workers in the U.S. will forgo an average of 12 paid vacation days this year, according to a recent Hotwire.com survey conducted by Harris Interactive. That's up from last year, when workers opted not to use nine of their paid vacation days—and it's twice as many days as workers gave up in 2011.

Why would *anyone* choose to work when they could be paid to take time off? About one-third of those surveyed said they couldn't afford to vacation. But here's the thing: When you disconnect from your work—whether you actually go on a trip or just take a few days to yourself at home—you give yourself time to recharge, says Joel Garfinkle, a career coach and the author of *Getting Ahead*. That can improve your job satisfaction, performance, morale, efficiency, and creativity, says Garfinkle. It can also help your relationships outside of the workplace since you'll have more time and energy to devote to them, too.

Of course, taking time off can be easier said than done. Use these tricks from Garfinkle to ward off the guilt and make taking PTO easier for you and your colleagues:

Ask, don't tell your boss when you'd like to take time off: Sure, you're technically entitled to vacation time. But asking—and doing it *before* you book your flights or RSVP to a destination wedding—will show you're a team player who's willing to find a time that's convenient for everyone.

Give plenty of notice: Ideally, you should be asking for vacation time one to two months in advance (although it's OK to occasionally give less notice if you're only requesting one or two days off). This way, your boss will have time to find someone to cover for you while you're out—or you'll have the opportunity to take care of your responsibilities ahead of time.

Broach the topic on a Friday. You'll get the best response if you ask your boss for time off in person and when she's in a good mood—and not when she's stressed or overwhelmed. For most managers, Friday's going to be the day they're most receptive to time-off requests. Tack your ask onto the end of a pre-scheduled meeting as the last item on the agenda.

Don't recite your entire itinerary: While it's OK to mention that you're taking time off to visit family or to finally see a city on your bucket list, you don't need share *all* the details—especially if they don't jibe with your professional rep. So if you're going skydiving or spending 4/20 in

Colorado, go ahead and keep it to yourself.

Request one vacation at a time: You may know *exactly* when you'd like to use every single vacation day this year—but you risk overwhelming your boss if you make too many different time off requests at once.