

## Project: Time Off

When was the last time you actually took a vacation...a real vacation? We aren't talking about a weekend getaway or even a week off work on a staycation.

An important contributor to performance on the job is how one spends time off the job. Many individuals fail to use their allotted and paid-for vacation time. When asked why, the answer often is "I just can't get away" or "I am in the middle of a big project" or simply "No time". Millions of vacation days go unused!

According to a study conducted by Oxford Economics in 2013, American workers took 23 percent fewer paid-for vacation days than in 2000. According to internal research by audit firm EY (formerly Ernst & Young), "employees who use more vacation days end up with better [performance reviews](#). Taking vacations can also help slow down employee turnover, saving companies the cost and effort of recruiting and training new hires. Other [research](#) has linked vacation time to increased worker productivity (<http://www.cnbc.com/2014/10/23/unused-vacation-days-at-40-year-high.html>)."

According to the Wall Street Journal blog, Americans are throwing away \$52.4 billion every year because they won't take time off from work. The article goes on to state that " Not only does our collective reluctance to go on vacation result in burnout, it can also affect firms' financial results, saddling U.S. businesses with \$224 billion in liabilities for accumulated employee vacation time." (<http://blogs.wsj.com/atwork/2015/03/04/the-cost-of-unused-vacation-time-224-billion/>) While workers, on average, have almost 21 days paid vacation time per year, they only use about 16. That is 5 days fewer than provided! What if we took time off to rest, refresh and enjoy new experiences? Is it possible that we may return to work with a clearer mind and with innovative perspectives? Absolutely!

One of the exciting parts of travel is meeting new people, whether they be locals, tourists or fellow travelers. These encounters can be a source of networking as well as new ideas. Often, people we meet on our journeys become friends and/or colleagues. They enrich our lives in numerous ways. When we travel internationally, we experience different cultures and customs. Contacts of this nature can frequently lead us to better understanding the diverse groups of employees within our organizations as well as the customers with whom we interact.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if companies provided sabbaticals as the universities do? Highly unlikely this will happen in the near future. However, we ourselves have the ability to take our own mini sabbaticals - at least five more days than we currently do. Let's commit to using our full vacation time next year. Your family will thank you for it! So will your boss!

Peace  
Erica and Harold

## **A Little Known Secret About Harold and Erica**

You probably already knew that besides being colleagues and business partners, we are also husband and wife! What you may not know, however, is that we are also IATA card carrying, home-based travel specialists. We've been booking travel for over 12 years!

How did this happen? Initially by accident, then by design. We were sending our associates out on projects all over the globe. One day, having just booked travel for over a dozen trips, we decided that we should get compensated for our hours of research and labor. A neighbor, whom we knew was a travel agent, explained to us the notion of home-based travel agents. In retrospect, we believe it was a precursor to the Uber or Lyft concept of today. We signed on with our neighbor's host agency and received their documentation and a list of training dates. Let us say that we were less than impressed with their documents, handbooks, training materials, tools and website. After attending our first training session, we were convinced the agency needed help.

What to do? Look elsewhere? We did some investigation, only to discover that the agency with which we had signed up was actually a lot better than most. The owner/director was a true SME with over 40 years of travel expertise. His core staff was made up of wonderful travel experts who knew their content areas. They were always available to assist agents. Unfortunately, they knew very little about how to help motivated individuals (many of them professionals like us) learn and perform. As we were excited about gaining more knowledge and capability about travel and they obviously needed help, why not offer to help improve their performance?

A marriage made in heaven. They were eager to clean up their act. We were enthusiastic about taking on this new project. We overhauled their documentation, improved recruitment procedures and radically transformed their training. In recompense, we received neat travel perks.

Fast forward to today and here we are highly engaged in the travel world. We receive live training four times a year, attend annual conferences, take on-line courses to obtain certifications of all kinds and, most importantly, we combine travel pleasure with our professional work. We have roamed the planet through a variety of travel adventures. We have met wonderful people, many of whom have become friends who come to visit and stay or travel with us and who, in turn have invited us to spend time with them in their parts of the world.

Our desire to improve our own business performance led us to improve another's. It has also been a great opportunity to break away from our normal work pressures. We always return from our trips refreshed and inspired. Travel,

which had always been part of our work life, has now become a stimulating hobby and a continuous opportunity for renewal.

We not only enjoy travel ourselves, we love introducing others to travel opportunities and vendors. For example, when European river cruising was just catching on, we traveled the Danube from Budapest to Prague and loved it. We then did Brussels to Amsterdam, round trip Lisbon, Paris to Burgundy, Paris to Normandy, and Zurich to Amsterdam. We have found river cruising to be the ideal way to visit European cities on our floating hotel. We are especially fond of Avalon Waterways ships, with their local guides and excellent value.

We both take and book ocean cruises as well. Ocean cruising is great for families with kids as there are programs aboard for tots through teens. And, the newer ships such as the Quantum Class and Oasis Class by RCCL have so many amazing activities on board that you look forward to days at sea!

Cruising is great for some people, but land lovers have many options available as well. There are well orchestrated group tours through vendors such as Tauck and Globus, both of which we have found provide excellent value and experiences for the price. A newer concept in the travel industry is independent travel, but with local hosts. This intriguing departure from the usual group touring offers the convenience of a seamless trip between major cities across the globe, while still "doing your own thing."

So what is the point of this story? Simply put, where we began was with a work issue. What we discovered was a whole new world (literally as well as figuratively) that includes leisure, relaxation, discovery and renewal. Most importantly we found that taking time off from the demands of work is not only desirable and fun, but is a necessity for our mental health and reinvigoration in our work.

Why not plan your dream vacation for 2016? We would love to deliver the world to you!

## **Oldie but Goodie**

"Small changes in behavior, large changes in performance," a statement that has demonstrated its validity over and over again throughout human history. It's amazing how use of simple words such as "please" and "thank you" powerfully affect the way we view and deal with individuals. Miniscule variations in the amounts of spices we apply in food preparation very strongly influence the taste of a dish. In the workplace, small changes in the environment or our work and social habits can generate tremendous impact on the productivity of people.

A number of research studies and reports have catalogued the seriously negative effect task interferences and distractions create on worker behavior. (See, for

example, Chad Brooks' brief article, "10 Distractions That Kill Workplace Productivity" [<http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/8098-distractions-killing-productivity.html>] in the June 15, 2015 issue of *Business News Daily*.) And yet, it's not hard to make "small changes" that can result in major productivity gains.

A few years, I wrote an article, "Task Interference: The Silent Performance Killer" (Workplace Performance Solutions, January 2007) that documented some of the egregious examples of task interference and how much time is actually lost due to the small, seemingly insignificant factors that are endemic to our work environments. Interested in eliminating these toxic elements from your organization? Visit [http://www.hsa-lps.com/E\\_News/ENews\\_Oct15/Task\\_Interference.pdf](http://www.hsa-lps.com/E_News/ENews_Oct15/Task_Interference.pdf) to read this oldie but still goodie for insights on how you can make those little changes that can lead to very large productivity improvement results.

## **Handbook of Training and Development**

Comprehensive. Insightful. Definitive. The second edition ASTD Handbook is the most valuable resource you can own as a training and development professional. Written by 96 of the best and brightest thinkers in the field and edited by Elaine Biech, its 55 chapters cover everything you need to know about the profession today.

HSA's very own Harold Stolovitch and Erica Keeps' chapter, "The Occasional Trainer: What You Must Know to Help Others Learn," can be read at [http://www.hsa-lps.com/E\\_News/ENews\\_Oct15/The\\_Occasional\\_Trainer.pdf](http://www.hsa-lps.com/E_News/ENews_Oct15/The_Occasional_Trainer.pdf).

The second edition ASTD Handbook can be purchased for \$145 or \$105 for ATD members. For more information, visit <https://www.td.org/Publications/Books/ASTD-Handbook-for-Training-and-Development>.

## **Guest Author Series**

From time to time, we encounter interesting people in our work whom we feel have something important to share with others. Our Guest Author Series includes writings and outright articles by these professional colleagues. The latest contribution in our series is by Charlie Pellerin, PhD (physics). He is an inventor, research astrophysicist, program director (NASA's Astrophysics Division for a decade) and President of a human development company, 4-D Systems. He is the author of *How NASA Builds Teams* (Wiley 2009). We asked him to share, in an informal way, how he became the well-known figure he is. Kindly, he has produced a reminiscence of his days at NASA, his strange journey from seeming failure to great success and the discoveries he made along the way. Charlie can be reached at [charliepellerin@gmail.com](mailto:charliepellerin@gmail.com).

## **Charlie's Story**

By Charlie Pellerin

Note: In the spirit of "there are no accidents," about a month ago, my colleague, Sharon Gu, came from Beijing to assist me with a workshop in Pasadena for a NASA/Jet Propulsion Laboratory team. On Sunday, Sharon invited me to join her and some "respected consultants" for lunch and an afternoon at the Norton Simon, a wonderful art museum. Near the end of the day, I realized that I knew Harold and Erica as the authors of one of the most influential books in my journey into the overwhelming power of (social) context. Indeed, *Training Ain't Performance* was my first insight into the power of "environment" with the impactful story of "Harry's Diner." Now, how this all began... (Continue reading by visiting [http://www.hsa-lps.com/E\\_News/ENews\\_Oct15/Charlies\\_Story.pdf](http://www.hsa-lps.com/E_News/ENews_Oct15/Charlies_Story.pdf)).

## **About Us**

At HSA Learning & Performance Solutions LLC, we've seen a lot over the years. We know the business of learning. We know the role human performance plays in business success. We know how to uncover and address needs, then create appropriate solutions. We pride ourselves on helping organizations achieve high levels of performance - and success. HSA is a leader in workplace learning and performance improvement. Our proven learning and performance solutions have helped maximize employee performance at dozens of organizations throughout the world. Our principals, Harold D. Stolovitch and Erica J. Keeps, share a common passion - developing people. Together they have devoted a combined total of over 80 years to make workplace learning and performance both enjoyable and effective. Their dedication to improving workplace learning and performance is reflected in the workshops they run internationally on training delivery, instructional design and performance consulting. Together, they are co-editors of the first two editions of the *Handbook of Human Performance Technology* and co-authors of the best-selling, award-winning series of books *Telling Ain't Training - Updated, Expanded and Enhanced*, *Training Ain't Performance*, *Beyond Telling Ain't Training Fieldbook* and *Beyond Training Ain't Performance Fieldbook* published by ASTD Press. They are also co-authors of the Wiley/Pfeiffer Learning & Performance Toolkit Series. To learn more, visit [www.hsa-lps.com](http://www.hsa-lps.com).