

| INTRODUCTION |

"I always knew that one day
I would take this road, but yesterday
I did not know today
would be the day."

—Nagarjuna

TIME OFF. TAKING A BREAK. Going on sabbatical. Being between gigs. These phrases describe a growing need among some of us to step out of the working world for a while. That need may be motivated by a desire to reset the balance in our lives, follow a creative dream, make a difference, give back to society, or explore something different. It may also be driven by less positive causes—job burnout, disillusionment with a career, or a life-changing event like death, illness, or divorce.

Whatever the reason, millions of us are ready for change—for a “Reboot Break”—for taking several months away from our everyday work in order to refresh and renew.

Unfortunately, most of us don’t know how to do it. Or we feel we can’t. Or we think we need permission. Fears about not having enough money, losing the respect of colleagues, being out of the “game,” or altering that self-image keep many of us from expanding our horizons.

When we had a farm economy, natural breaks provided time to renew. As recently as the 1980s, people spent more time at home than they do today—time having dinner with their families and watching

television, reading, or playing board games. There was more time for relaxation, exploring, thinking.

Today we rarely have time for rest. We have lost even our short breaks. Technology—pagers, PCs, laptops, the Internet, cell phones, BlackBerrys, and smartphones—beckons us to be “on” 24/7. Even when we’re supposedly “off”—on weekends or in the evenings—we are “on,” and it is taking a toll.

We’re a nation on the verge of burnout. We need to take a break. We need to regroup, renew, and reinvigorate our lives. We need to give ourselves the “gift of time.”

According to a 2009 Gallup Poll and statistics from Monster.com, the numbers underscore the stress people are feeling in the workplace and the desire for change. American workers are working more hours than they did twenty years ago, with men averaging 49.9 hours and women 44 hours per week. Eighty-six percent of workers are experiencing job stress, and half describe their stress as “extreme fatigue” or “feeling out of control.” Sixty percent of workers feel pressure to work too much, and 83 percent of employees want more time with their families. Over 50 percent of employees are either somewhat or completely dissatisfied with their jobs, and 83 percent of workers plan to look for a new job when the economy improves.

What a testament to the need for taking time off!

To be competitive as a nation and thrive as individuals in the twenty-first century, we all need time to refresh and recharge. To be creative and productive, we must be nourished, too.

It is time to give ourselves a break and “reboot our lives.”

Most would agree that Americans don’t know how to take a real break, and many of us long to modify work to recapture our evenings, Saturdays and Sundays, and our vacations. Those who have taken sabbaticals have found that when they return to work, they are far more likely to take breaks in the future. They are able to acknowledge that they need them. They’ve seen the benefits of time that is truly “off” and the importance of pacing themselves. As one engineer told us after a six-month break, “A sabbatical actually resets our ‘beingness,’ making us aware of the need to check in with our inner selves.”

This book is about regaining that time and creating a more desirable cycle of work, relaxation, and personal growth, and about the self-discovery and acceptance that comes from exploration and rest.

We've talked to more than two hundred people who have taken a Reboot Break—men and women from their twenties to their seventies, from a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and professional backgrounds—to learn why they decided to take time off from work, how they did it, and what they learned.

This includes, of course, those who have had to take unexpected sabbaticals because they were laid off in a down economy. Rather than taking the first job they're offered, many people spend three to six months or more stepping back and reassessing their goals and their opportunities.

Taking time out from work to reboot your life is not just a new and enduring trend; it's a necessity in our stress-ridden world. This book will give you the guidance and resources to negotiate a Reboot Break, whatever your age and stage of life and even in tough economic times. Meaningful time off can be an important path, not only to personal development, but also to career advancement. What's more, you deserve it!

In addition to interviewing sabbatical takers about their experiences, we wanted to understand how employers are viewing sabbaticals. To that end, we have examined more than fifty corporations, law firms, non-profits, small businesses, and educational institutions that provide funding for sabbaticals, allow their employees to take unpaid leave, or support the concept in some other way. Many organizations see sabbaticals as a recruitment and retention tool that helps create a resilient and loyal workforce. Later in the book, we help you make the case to your employer for your Reboot Break and for instituting a Reboot Break policy.

SOME COMMON THEMES

One of the key themes that emerged in our interviews with men and women who took time off was the importance of planning. We spend

two chapters on this (Chapters 3 and 4), one of which is entirely devoted to financial planning and the consideration of things like health insurance and retirement savings.

A second major theme was that there are at least four phases to a sabbatical:

- I. Creating Space—Putting your life in order
- II. Reconnection—Revitalizing connections to people, places, activities, and self
- III. Exploration—Learning new things, especially through travel
- IV. Reentry—Starting a new chapter of your life

We devote three chapters to these phases, Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

A third major theme was that all the people we interviewed, no matter the experience, felt that their lives had improved after the sabbatical. They experienced better career opportunities, or enhanced personal relationships, or a new sense of self-respect. We use their stories throughout the book to illustrate this.

Our mission is to empower overworked Americans and others to plan for and take much-needed career intermissions in order to rest, recharge, stimulate new thinking, and come back better prepared for the challenges and opportunities they face.

We hope to broaden your horizons by encouraging you to give yourself the “gift of time” to find your real interests and explore them. In the pages ahead, we address common hesitations and fears head-on and provide practical, easy-to-read, and actionable ways to plan, prepare for, and actualize the life-changing break from work that we call rebooting your life. Each chapter has exercises that will help you with your plan, and the Appendix is rich in worksheets and resources.

The book is designed to allow you to skip around, find topics and exercises of interest, and take what is relevant to you now. It is also designed to take you step by step through the planning and implementation of time off from work . . . what we call the Reboot Break. We hold retreats across the United States to help people think about, and

plan for, their time off. The Appendix has more information about the Reboot Your Life Retreats.

We invite you to use this book as your companion, friend, advisor, and support group, all rolled into one. Our message to you is simple: *By taking time out to reboot, personally and professionally, you too can live the better, richer, fuller life you've been seeking.*