



**John T. Berry**

# If You Could...Would You?

I just returned from a meeting attended by other executive directors from around the Midwest.

One topic of discussion got me thinking about all of our lives as attorneys. The topic? *Sabbaticals*.

We heard a report on the increased use of sabbaticals within law firms and even bar associations. The typical program allows individuals after a certain number of years of service (usually 10) to take paid time off. The amount of time off ranges from one month to six months.

Wait! Don't stop reading! I know what most of you are thinking. Are they nuts? We can't just leave our clients or jobs. Either there is no one able to take care of the work or if there is, there is no one who can do it well enough to allow me the luxury of lounging around a beach for three months!

My article is entitled "If You Could... Would You?" Would you really? What struck me about the discussion the other executive directors and I had was that many said they would not take the time off. "I love my job." "I'm needed too much." "Returning would be so bad that it's not worth it." "Foolish waste of time."

Bravado? Chest thumping over the values of our worth? Sincere love for the work? I'm not here to evaluate or judge. I'd love your

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thoughts in this regard. Mostly I am sharing a moment of reflection.

What struck me is the likely reaction of our friends, family, and loved ones. What would they say if we came home and said, "Guess what? This summer we *all* are going to spend three months together." Now if your family was to react by saying they would appreciate you reconsidering, it just might mean you have waited way too long to consider this option for your life.

I must admit my first reaction to those who would never take such an option was to say, "Get a life"—diversify your interests! Maybe for the first time in our Type A over-achieving life, just enjoy this world and our loved ones with no goal, strategic plan, or financial incentive set as a target.

Would you... if you could? If so what *would* you do? Maybe the answer to that last question is as important for us as whether we take the time off or not—let us know.

The intention of this short article is not to minimize the difficulty we all have in taking time off from work. Each day off carries with it consequences, including mounting e-mails, crammed schedules for months upon our returns, and even lost clients. It just may cost us a lot more than the vacation.

What struck me the most in listening to my fellow lawyers was the consequences of

not taking time off: increased stress, health problems, loss of time with the ones we love the most.



I solicit one bit of advice from those reading this article. For those of you who either have taken a sabbatical or extended vacations, how did you do it? Help the lawyers who think it is just impossible. I know there are a lot of attorneys who could use your advice and encouragement. ♦



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