

**TRANSCRIPT**  
**PODCAST #10: SABBATICALS**

VOICE-OVER: Here is this week's Raising The Bar podcast for Business To Business Magazine with Business Development Coach Robin Hensley.

ROBIN: Have you found yourself daydreaming lately about what it would be like to chuck your workaday world and head out on a great adventure? Perhaps you would like to stop working long enough to lend your time and talent to a cause you really believe in. How about just doing nothing? Does the idea of that fire you up?

Hello and welcome. I'm Robin Hensley. This week we are exploring time and how you can make the time to refresh and enrich your life through the sabbatical.

Dubbed "the world's best perk", sabbaticals are rapidly becoming a part of the world of business. Once a benefit reserved exclusively for the academic world, sabbaticals now offer businesses an additional lure for recruiting and retention.

Wikipedia tells us that a sabbatical, derived from the Greek word "sabbatikos" is a prolonged hiatus, typically one year, in the career of an individual taken in order to fulfill some goal like writing a book or traveling extensively for research. These are generally paid breaks offered by academic institutions. In the business world, sabbaticals are becoming popular for providing a career break and are usually but not always unpaid.

Today, 11% of large companies offer paid sabbaticals to their employees and 29% offer unpaid sabbaticals, according to the Society for Human Resource Management. When you figure that working a 40 hour week for 49 weeks a year over a 40 year career means you have invested 78,400 hours in your work, not including the real extra hours you know you put in, a sabbatical may start to look pretty good right now. But sabbaticals are not reserved exclusively for the employee with long service. In the UK, for example, where 20% of companies have a career break policy and 10% are considering it, young professionals are opting for and being granted sabbaticals as a break from work to determine if a career path is correct for them. Imagine where you might be today if you had that option when you were first starting out.

In a survey conducted by the creative staffing firm Aquent with the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth University, American professionals indicated a strong interest in sabbaticals with sixty-eight percent of women and fifty-eight percent of men saying they would consider taking an extended leave from work.

If *you* had the chance to take a sabbatical, would you? If your answer is yes, as I suspect it might be, then OK, let's hear the arguments.

“Robin, I would love to take a sabbatical, but how in the world can I break away from my work long enough to benefit from what a sabbatical might do for me?”

Good question and one I would expect you to ask. I have a one-word, two-letter strategy in response that will throw the door open for you and maybe much more you have wished you could do. It is a strategy I use myself. It is how I was able to take the month of July off last year to pursue other important interests. As anti-drug initiatives used to urge, “Just say no.” I’ll bet you are shaking in your boots right now at the prospect of it. Learning to say no (and mean it) is one of the hardest lessons any of us will learn. Being prepared to say no when saying no is the right thing to do will give you the space to imagine what a sabbatical year could do for you. But maybe yours is an industry where sabbaticals seem impossible. Then you may be surprised to learn what some businesses are doing in that regard as reported by Jeanne Sahadi, senior writer for CNNMoney.com.

- For example, employees with American Express with at least ten years of service can apply for a paid sabbatical lasting one to six months to work for a non-profit or school of their choice.
- After seven years of service with investment firm American Century, employees can take a four-week paid sabbatical in addition to any vacation time they may have.
- Since 1986, partners in the law firm Alston & Bird are entitled to a paid sabbatical ranging from one to four months depending on their age and tenure.
- Goldman Sachs launched a public service sabbatical program in 2004. Their managing directors, vice presidents and executive directors are allowed a year of paid leave to work with a charitable, public service or cultural organization of their choosing.

If you are intrigued and at least open to the possibility of a sabbatical, then John Rossheim, Senior Contributing Writer for monster.com offers these tips for how to plan for and take a sabbatical while reducing the risk of derailing your career.

- Step One: Learn about your company’s sabbatical policy, if it has one. The first place to look is your employee manual but that is not the ultimate guide. It’s possible your firm has a policy but it hasn’t caught up with the manual yet.
- Step Two: Prepare a positive pitch. It’s important that you keep your interest in a sabbatical to yourself while you formulate your pitch, however. Carefully write out

what you want to do, why and when you will return before exploring the idea further with your boss or Human Resources. Be sure to use the word “sabbatical” in any inquiry or pitch you make. It’s a word with power and strength attached to it. “Sabbatical” says you have a plan but it also raises the bar on your employer’s expectations for its benefit to you and to them. Be sure you can live up to it. By the way, working with a coach can help you shape your plan and give you an edge in pleading your case. Hint. Hint.

- **Step Three:** Think creatively. If your company does not have a formal sabbatical or extended leave program and you still want to ask for one, then you may have to look for an opportunity to negotiate. You might time your request to coincide with a raise or bonus, asking if you can have, say, two months time off instead. You might also suggest that what you will be doing could be a great public relations opportunity for building good press about the company. The economy might also make an unpaid leave attractive to your employer, giving the company a chance to save some money now with the chance for you to return at a pre-agreed upon date when things will hopefully be much improved.
- **Step Four:** Keep in touch while you are away. Wherever your sabbatical takes you in the world, checking in from time to time will keep you in your company’s thoughts. You might even consider doing a project from time to time, just to keep your hand in. Technology makes communication easier from even the remotest parts of the planet. Dashing off a note on how things are going with pictures will keep people involved. A blog or online journal that your boss and co-workers can follow will make others feel a part of what you are doing and able to cheer you on.
- **Step Five:** Keep your skills sharp and ready for your return. That same Aquent study I mentioned earlier reveals that sixty-one percent of hiring managers welcome workers who have been on extended leaves to update their skills. Keep that in mind as you choose how you will spend your sabbatical time. And don’t forget to keep your professional memberships and licenses current.
- **Step Six:** Get back in touch early about your return. Give your employer plenty of notice of your expected date back. This will give your boss or Human Resources time to find a suitable spot for you if your job has been filled during your absence.

One final thought about sabbaticals. If you are serious about taking one, make a commitment to achieving that goal right now and start planning for it. When I made that commitment for myself, it took months of planning, preparation and saying “no” to free up an



entire month for what I wanted to do. This year it is easier because I know what those four weeks can do for me and I can't wait to have them.

Until next time, this is Robin Hensley with Raising the Bar.

VOICE-OVER: You have been listening to a Raising The Bar program on sabbaticals with Business Development Coach Robin Hensley. For a full transcript of this program, stop by the Business To Business Magazine website at [btobmagazine.com](http://btobmagazine.com) or [raisingthebar.com](http://raisingthebar.com).

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999 Peachtree Street N. E. / Suite 2660 / Atlanta, GA 30309-4484  
P 404.815.4110 / F 404.601.7494 / [www.raisingthebar.com](http://www.raisingthebar.com) / [rhensley@raisingthebar.com](mailto:rhensley@raisingthebar.com)