



Roundtable Mentor,
Michael Sadler, Director of Planning & Decision Support at Meridian Credit Union, shared his perspective on how to establish work boundaries while on vacation, without compromising your career.

Mentoring **MATTERS**

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I have vacation time coming up and I'd really like to not take my laptop but my boss has a habit of emailing with work questions. How can I set some boundaries around contact with the office in a way that doesn't limit my career?

I've worked for many Executives who expected constant availability, yet, I've never logged on to my laptop while I was away. Despite this, my bonuses and performance appraisals have remained strong. How? For me, it comes down to three things.

1. It's not about you.

Going on holiday without the expectation of accessibility isn't something you can initiate a few weeks before your departure. It depends on building trust between you, your Executives and your team. Making yourself invaluable to your manager may sound like a great career strategy, but the downside is that going on uninterrupted holiday and subsequently being recommended for promotions and new roles is unlikely. You've made yourself too essential. And, you may also be demoralizing for your team, knowing their manager once removed has so little faith in them they would rather disrupt someone's vacation than deal with them!

Your manager is worried about coping without you. Here's how to handle that:

- As part of your leadership M.O., highlight your team's work and achievements to the boss. Give your team opportunities to respond to manager requests and give them recognition for their efforts and achievements. Build confidence in them. Build your manager's confidence that you're a leader of people, that they can cope without you and that you can build a succession plan for when you want that next promotion.
- Make your holiday a positive reason to be out of touch. Propose it to your manager as an explicit strategy, using it as a joint way to test your team. With the team, present it as a demonstration of trust and an opportunity to build their capability with the boss. Watch the morale soar as they step up to the plate! Include a post return review, as part of the process to identify any additional coaching needs.

2. It IS about you.

It is said that we train others how to treat us. If you're okay with contact outside of business hours, why should your manager mind? In a lighthearted way signal how much you're looking forward to the downtime, how much your family is looking forward to having you to themselves. It's also important to:

- Reassure your manager that everything is covered. Give them the names of leaders who will supply them with what they need, in your absence. (And if this is the 1st time they have heard those names or wonder what they look like... shame on you!)
- Make sure your email states you are away and out of touch. (I use "with extremely limited internet access" in the message.)
- Communicate your confidence in the team. For example, my boss' out of office message is full of positivity and reassurance of the wonderful service people will get from her team, in her absence.
- Advise people weeks in advance that you'll be away. If something's brewing, they can flush it out before you go and feel they are helping with your plans. One colleague flags impending holiday on their email signature!

3. Creating disruption (blame someone else).

If the boss knows you're online, it's easy for them to tell themselves "it's just one little thing" or "it'll only take a minute". So, change the operating model when you are away. My wife (love her for this) takes my work phone and laptop into safekeeping as we depart. More importantly, my boss knows this. It communicates that holidays are family time. As a compromise, I give my boss my wife's mobile number, reassuring them that even though I won't be able to read email contacts, I can still be reached in a pinch.

To recap:

- Create a culture where you are seen as a leader of capable people.
- Reassure and prepare management (and team) for your absence.
- Make your absence a positive event to test capability, succession planning and keyman dependency issues.
- Reset the operating model for contact to show the transition to personal time.

Do this and you will enjoy your holiday, create a motivated team and be seen as a strong and accomplished leader of the business. Don't... well then, let's just hope that sandcastle comes with a USB port and wifi. My own current boss is superb. There is never a question of my being on my laptop on holiday and being easily in touch. A lot of this is to do with her values and leadership (she's brilliant) but through the above techniques, I have tried to play my part in enabling that position.



Michael Sadler is currently the Director of Planning & Decision Support at Meridian Credit Union with over 25 years of leadership success in effective business, strategy, people and program leadership roles.

Prior to relocating to Canada in 2015 he has worked primarily in the British financial sector with organisations of varying cultures and scale (NatWest, RBS, Portman Building Society, Nationwide Building Society) through times of both organic and integration based growth, driving cultural change and performance improvement. Michael is a respected leader, passionate about developing future business leaders and coaching for excellence.



Glain Roberts-McCabe is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.