**Plan a Break to Prevent or Recover from Burnout**

Many in the accounting industry felt burned out after a hard slog with little relief for nearly two years of the global pandemic. Many accounting professionals had a delayed reaction to the stress after helping clients without a break for two years – but once things calmed down, people in this industry started to feel the accumulated pressure even though most restrictions were removed and businesses were largely functioning as usual.

Of course, burnout can hit a person at any time; it's not only a pandemic phenomenon. Family stresses, illness, relationship breakdown and accidents can all affect a person’s resilience and coping mechanisms.

How long since you have taken a proper break?

Taking a break from all work commitments, schedules, meetings, and emails will allow you to rest and recuperate. Taking a break also gives you a chance to gain perspective on your work situation. Once you return to work, you may have new ideas about changes you want to implement, and hopefully, you will also have the energy!

As soon as you schedule time away from work, you will have that to look forward to, and you may find yourself re-energised by thoughts of your holiday!

Too many solo accounting technicians never take a proper holiday – they take their work with them, they still do payroll, they check email… unless you disengage entirely from your work, you won't feel recovered.

**Steps to Taking a Holiday**

1. Make the commitment to your own wellbeing and block out time in your calendar.
2. Start planning well ahead of time. Notify clients and if you need to do extra work beforehand, prepare for it, so you are not cramming two weeks' worth of work into one week and exhausting yourself just before going away.
3. Be strict about your boundaries. Notify clients about the dates you are unavailable and include helpful links if appropriate or contact details of others who can help while you are away.
4. Check with the tax agent ahead of time if they will be available to assist with your client’s queries, payroll and so on during your break.
5. Plan ahead for alternative arrangements such as preparing ABA files before the payment date, train business owners or managers in basic functions so they can survive while you are away.
6. Consider getting help from a colleague or contractor if you work on your own and feel you can’t disengage completely from your clients. Your clients will understand that you need a break – let them know when you will be back, and they will most likely work with you to help you take a holiday. You would probably offer them extra support if they went away and needed your help – so assume that your clients will support you. Arranging support from a colleague – even if it’s fielding queries and emails, without working on the client files – can be reassuring for the clients.
7. Plan for at least two breaks every year! Make holidays a habit. You are more than likely very responsible, don’t want to let your clients down, and are always willing to help them. However, it’s just as important to look after yourself.
8. Even if you don’t leave home, still take a proper break from client work!
9. Temporarily deactivate all work-related notifications from your phone and mobile. Consider organising your phone work apps into a folder that you simply don’t look at while you are on a break.

If you can’t take a break but you need rest and recuperation time, here are some ideas to help your mental health and wellbeing.

* Assess your workload and clients – is it time to get stronger around boundaries and work hours so you are not overworked?
* Pick a couple of days a week where you can give yourself a relaxed morning and start late, then work a shorter day.
* Or pick a couple of days where you can finish early and do some exercise or something else for your health and wellbeing.
* Organise a walk or coffee with a colleague and let yourselves ‘blow off some steam’ about your own work and client challenges. It’s important to acknowledge how things really are before trying to change anything. Talking with a colleague who ‘gets it’ can help to lighten the load and together you can support each other to make changes and look after your own wellbeing.
* Make a date for some self-care or wellbeing activity and block it out in your calendar – make it a regular weekly or fortnightly event.
* Take a long weekend completely off work every month. (Working “only half an hour” or checking your email is banned!)

**Benefits of Taking a Proper Break**

In case you need convincing to take time out…

* Rest, adventure and play improves your immune system and general health and wellbeing.
* Exhaustion increases the likelihood of mistakes, accidents and illness. Overwork increases the likelihood of anxiety, depression and chronic stress issues.
* Living from a relaxed state improves enjoyment, effectiveness and productivity.
* Taking a break allows you to re-evaluate your life and how you are living it.
* You simply feel better about yourself and life in general.
* Take a break before you burnout – not after. Prevention is always easier than recovery.
* Do not underestimate the relief and rest that comes from putting your responsibilities to others on hold for time.

Often slowing down and creating some space and relaxation actually increases productivity when you get back into work mode.

Sustaining your health and wellbeing is essential to long-term planning for your practice or business. Factoring in regular breaks allows you to prevent burnout and is easier than trying to recover afterwards.