



the supplement  
FACILITATING VITALITY

## AUGUST 2019 SUMMER VACATION

With back-to-school sales splashed across the media, you may have missed your last chance to grab a summer vacation. Strictly defined, vacation is a scheduled suspension of school/business/work for rest, travel, and recreation. Unlike our European counterparts, vacation is not legally mandated in the US. Most US employers do, however, offer paid vacation days as a benefit to their employees. While Europeans would think this immoral, according to the third annual US Travel Association's *State of American Vacation 2018*, 52% of Americans do not take all of their vacation time. It does however mark the third straight year of increased vacation usage. While we still aren't taking the 20+ days we averaged over the 1978-2000 period, we are edging closer with employees taking 17+ days in 2018. This is up from the 2014 low of 16.0 days.

Countless studies support the upside of taking a vacation. Some of the benefits to employers are higher productivity, stronger morale, and greater employee retention. Internal control is better too. (Yes, I am still part auditor.) Employees who take vacations experience reduced stress and anxiety, decreased risk for heart disease, increased positivity and creativity, broadened perspective and improved personal relationships. With all of this potential value, why do individuals persist in the distorted belief that they are best served by not taking vacation? According to the US Travel Association's 2018 study, the top justification is fear.

**61% FEAR LOOKING REPLACEABLE**

**56% FEAR FALLING BEHIND**

**56% FEAR DROPPING THE BALL**

That is a lot of fear! The action tendency associated with fear is to run or fight. Since both of these choices are ill-advised in a work environment, convincing oneself to work relentlessly is an easy sell.

The good news is that vacations don't need to be prolonged to result in the health and wellbeing benefits accruing to both employers and employees. The real magic isn't in the vacation. It's in the improved sleep and increased autonomy (2013, *Journal of Happiness*). Given that Americans don't seem willing to avail themselves to their full vacation benefits, perhaps getting some sleep and finding a little "me" time would improve the status quo?

The latest research finds that 7-8 hours of sleep is correlated with the lowest rate of mortality. The breakthrough is that the sleep doesn't have to be contiguous to be health promoting. As long as the 7-8 hours accumulate within a 24-hour period, it appears to be good enough. This is great news for those working shifts, parents of young children





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and others who rely on naps. Arianna Huffington, an outspoken sleep advocate, says “nap rooms will soon be as common as conference rooms.” Progressive employers such as Google, Zappos and Ben & Jerry’s have built nap rooms. Hammer Schlemmer, the bespoke retailer, offers productivity-boosting nap pods for a mere \$16,000. These sleep chairs, produced by MetroNaps since 2003, can be found incorporated into the office environments of Facebook and Procter & Gamble.

As for the “me” time, whether it is a boat trip, a day at the beach, an hour with a good book, or 20 minutes in a nap pod, it doesn’t particularly matter. It is simply the ability to decide for oneself. I was recently reminded of the importance of autonomy when considering how to spend my free time. Last Sunday, while on vacation with my son, I was treated to an hour in an escape room. Fortunately, he is clever as I would have gone down with the ship.



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Patricia M. Fuller has dedicated the last 20 years to designing and delivering wellness programs. Her events earn consistently excellent ratings for her holistic approach and her real world application.

Prior to concentrating in wellness, Pat taught accounting and auditing as an adjunct professor at the University of Tampa. She earned her CPA designation in 1992 as a senior associate for Coopers & Lybrand. She has a Masters in Business Administration from the University of Utah.

Pat has a PhD in holistic nutrition. In 2010, she was board certified by the Holistic Nutrition Credentialing Board. Her areas of research include stress management and eating habits. She is a Certified Wellcoach and a member of the Institute of Coaching. She is an annual attendee to The Harvard Medical School Conference, Coaching In Leadership & Healthcare.

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