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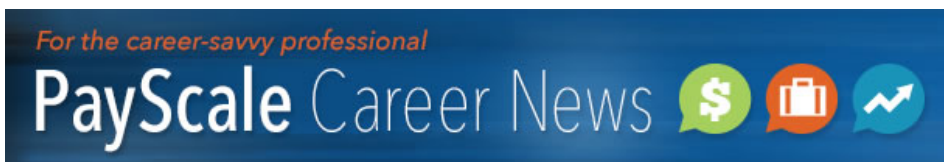
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Vacations Are Good for You and Good for Your Employer

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Jen Hubley Luckwaldt, PayScale
Aug 11, 2014

It's not news that **many Americans don't take vacations** -- or that they **should**. But at this time of year, it bears repeating: that last-minute getaway might mean the difference between doing your job well, and stumbling through the day with low energy and a bad attitude.



(Photo Credit: [Wellington Snipe](#) via [Unsplash](#))

In [The New York Times](#), Daniel J. Levitin explains why we need vacations, as well as coffee breaks, personal days, and time for family dinners and pickup softball games:

"If you're feeling overwhelmed, there's a reason: The processing capacity of the conscious mind is limited. This is a result of how the brain's attentional system evolved. Our brains have two dominant modes of attention: the task-positive network

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and the task-negative network (they're called networks because they comprise distributed networks of neurons, like electrical circuits within the brain). The task-positive network is active when you're actively engaged in a task, focused on it, and undistracted; neuroscientists have taken to calling it the central executive. The task-negative network is active when your mind is wandering; this is the daydreaming mode. These two attentional networks operate like a seesaw in the brain: when one is active the other is not."

Levitin, the director of the Laboratory for Music, Cognition and Expertise at McGill University, and Vinod Menon, professor of neuroscience at Stanford, have researched a third component of this system, the attentional filter. This filter lets us switch back and forth between task-positive and task-negative networks, allowing for inspiration to strike (task-negative) and productive invention to take place (task-positive).

In short, in order to get stuff done, you need both these networks, plus a functioning attentional filter, which is why productivity experts frequently advise us to break up our days into blocks and work on one project at a time, instead of trying (and failing) to multitask.

The other big piece of advice? Take breaks. As Levitin points out, "high-attention" jobs like air traffic controller have these rest periods built in for a reason, specifically the fact that human beings can't work efficiently or well without them. Take time off, and you'll have more focus to bring to projects when you return to work.

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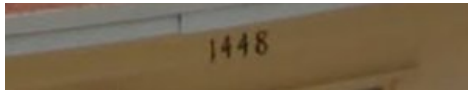
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