

## Good-bye burnout! How a sabbatical could help mitigate its effect.

### 1 Warmer

sabbatical = a period away from work when people can study, rest or travel

- Do you know anyone who has taken sabbatical leave? Have you?
- Do you think going on sabbatical leave can be good for someone's career? Why?
- What could happen if you take too long a break from work?

### 2 Key words

- Write the words from the box next to the definitions below. Check your answers and your understanding of the words by using the same word to complete the example sentence after each definition. Then read the complete article to see how each of the key words is used in context.

contender      enviable      guise      oblivion      peril      promote

1. danger \_\_\_\_\_

*The animal sensed its life was in \_\_\_\_\_ and started to run.*

2. the way someone or something appears to people \_\_\_\_\_

*Good leaders come in many \_\_\_\_\_ – some talk a lot while others are just good listeners.*

3. a word to describe a quality or situation is one that other people admire and would like to have as well \_\_\_\_\_

*They get one month of leave a year, and their other employee benefits are also \_\_\_\_\_.*

4. move someone to a job at a higher level \_\_\_\_\_

*Rebecca was \_\_\_\_\_ to a senior sales position.*

5. someone who competes with other people for a prize or job \_\_\_\_\_

*Sarah was a strong \_\_\_\_\_ for the sales manager position.*

6. a situation in which someone or something has been completely forgotten \_\_\_\_\_

*VHS was once considered impressive technology, but it has fallen into \_\_\_\_\_.*

burn out      cheer      extended      headhunt      rivalry      slack off

7. continuing for longer than usual \_\_\_\_\_

*The cleaning company's contract was \_\_\_\_\_.*

8. try to persuade someone to leave their job and go to work for another company

\_\_\_\_\_

*The technology company \_\_\_\_\_ students who have recently graduated.*

9. make yourself ill or unable to continue working because you have worked too hard

\_\_\_\_\_

*After working hard on the new product for six months, the team was completely*

\_\_\_\_\_.

10. a situation in which people, teams, businesses etc compete with one another

\_\_\_\_\_

*Tom and Jerry are a cat and mouse that share \_\_\_\_\_ and friendship.*

11. slow down or become less \_\_\_\_\_

*I started running every day in January, but I \_\_\_\_\_ a couple of months later.*

12. a feeling of happiness \_\_\_\_\_

*All the lights and decorations make me feel such holiday \_\_\_\_\_!*

## *The unexpected perils of sabbatical leave*

**PEOPLE WHO TAKE A BIG BREAK FROM WORK CAN RETURN IN NEW GUISES THAT SURPRISE COLLEAGUES AND BOSSES ALIKE**

**PILITA CLARK**

- 1 What does the new chief financial officer of HSBC have in common with one of the world's top crime writers and a billionaire Silicon Valley tech titan?
- 2 The answer is not obvious because each is a member of an unusual club. They all took sabbatical leave from an enviable corporate job and returned to find themselves on a path to bigger, bolder success.
- 3 Georges Elhedery's story is the most surprising. He was in his late forties and co-head of investment banking at HSBC in January when he announced he was taking six months off for "personal development". This was a rare move for anyone in the remorseless world of investment banking, especially a senior banker. So was what happened next.
- 4 When Elhedery returned, having learnt some Mandarin, he was promoted to chief financial officer in a move that made him a contender for the top job of chief executive.
- 5 Here lie two important lessons, starting with the idea that a sabbatical is career suicide because anyone who takes one is visibly less committed to their career.
- 6 Elhedery shows otherwise, which leads to a second lesson: beware of mouthing off about a colleague heading to apparent career oblivion via extended leave. You might find them firmly back in the office – and your boss.
- 7 Different conclusions can be drawn from other members of the supercharged sabbatical club. Before he became a bestselling Norwegian crime writer, Jo Nesbø studied to be a financial analyst and was headhunted by a top brokerage firm, DNB Markets, to build up its options division.
- 8 He was also playing guitar in a band at night and, after a year, was so burnt out he told both his boss and the band he needed six months off. "I hopped on a plane to Australia, to get as far away from Norway as I could," he once wrote.
- 9 On the long flight from Oslo to Sydney, he came up with a plot for a novel about a flawed but likeable detective named Harry Hole. By the time he got back home, Nesbø had almost finished the first of what would become the hugely popular Harry Hole thrillers and was on his way to becoming a publishing phenomenon worth millions of dollars.
- 10 Nesbø's story offers a different lesson about sabbaticals: they do not always deliver a tanned, rested worker fired up to do years more loyal work. They sometimes produce a competitor, such as Marc Benioff, co-founder of the Salesforce software company.
- 11 Benioff was earning a multimillion-dollar salary in what he described in a memoir as "the greatest job I could ever have imagined", at the software powerhouse Oracle, when he sank into a profound malaise. When he told his boss, Larry Ellison, Oracle's co-founder, the older man told him to take a three-month sabbatical. Benioff went to India, found guidance from a "hugging saint" and began to think about forming his own software business. Two years later, he left Oracle and set up Salesforce, sparking a sometimes tetchy rivalry with Ellison.
- 12 What does all this show? For one thing, easy assumptions are often wrong in corporate life, as they are in much of life generally. The urge to have a rest from years of relentless work burns brightly in many people, including those with no desire to quit or slack off.
- 13 Equally, sabbaticals do not automatically guarantee company loyalty. Their popularity will inspire commitment in many workers, even if research shows the cheering effects of even six months off can fade soon after returning to work. But people such as Benioff and Nesbø are unlikely to be held in place by the lure of a long break, no matter how much they might want it at the time.

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14 Ultimately though, if you work for a company that offers a sabbatical, you are exceedingly fortunate, especially in the US. Just 5 per cent of employers offered paid sabbatical leave in 2019, according to a Society for Human Resource Management survey of its US-based members. A barely much better 11 per cent had an unpaid sabbatical programme.

15 For most of us, this type of leave is precious, so grab it if you can, even if it fails to deliver everything that you, or your colleagues or bosses, are expecting.

**FT**

Pilita Clark, 3 December, 2022

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## 3 Understanding the article

### a. After reading the article, complete the statements with the correct options.

- The people mentioned in the article all \_\_\_\_\_ before they took sabbatical leave.
  - had enviable jobs
  - hated the jobs they had
- It is \_\_\_\_\_ for investment bankers to take six months off for personal development.
  - not surprising
  - not usual
- Elhedery spent six months \_\_\_\_\_ on sabbatical leave.
  - learning a language
  - travelling to China
- Nesbø started his writing career while he was \_\_\_\_\_.
  - on a flight to Sydney
  - a financial analyst
- Benioff had his dream job at Oracle, but he \_\_\_\_\_.
  - didn't make a lot of money
  - wasn't satisfied
- A couple of years after Benioff's sabbatical, he \_\_\_\_\_.
  - had a better job at Oracle
  - started a successful company
- The author believes that sabbaticals \_\_\_\_\_.
  - are a valuable opportunity
  - encourage company loyalty

## 4 Business language

### a. Find these collocations in the article and match them to their meanings.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. corporate job / life<br>(paragraphs 2 and 12) _____ | a. something that you do that is likely to have very bad results for your professional life   |
| 2. career suicide<br>(paragraph 5) _____               | b. relating to working in a large company   |
| 3. financial analyst<br>(paragraph 7) _____            | c. a company that organises business deals for other people   |
| 4. brokerage firm<br>(paragraph 7) _____               | d. a software company that has a lot of power or influence  |
| 5. software powerhouse<br>(paragraph 11) _____         | e. support that you always give to a company because of your feelings of duty towards them  |
| 6. company loyalty<br>(paragraph 13) _____             | f. someone whose job is to carefully examine financial markets and events in order to provide other people with information about companies and investments |

### b. Discuss the questions.

1. Do you want to work in a corporate job?
2. Can you name a software powerhouse?
3. Do you think employees owe their company loyalty?

## 5 Discussion questions

### a. Discuss these questions.

- Were you surprised by what happened to Elhedery, Nesbø, and Benioff after their sabbaticals? Why?
- Do you think sabbatical leave can help normal people become more successful?
- How could taking sabbatical leave help you in your career or studies?
- Would you worry about being bored or about not using your time well?
- Do you think all companies should offer their workers extended unpaid leave?

## 6 Wider business theme – HR sabbatical leave policy and employee wellbeing

### a. Read the five benefits of sabbatical leave below. Which ideas do you like the most?

1. *According to SHRM, 15% of US employers offered their workers sabbatical leave in 2018.*
2. *It can be a great benefit and can help to attract and keep skilled employees.*
3. *Sabbaticals can also reduce burnout, stress, and depression. It's can be a good investment. The WHO says that for every \$1 spent on mental health, there's a \$4 return in improved productivity.*
4. *Time outside the office can help employees develop new skills outside the office. The rest of the team will also have to learn new things to cover their colleague's position.*
5. *Employees usually come back with new ideas and inspiration, which can be contagious.*

### b. Work together to create a leave policy for your organisation. Use the questions to guide you.

1. Who can go on a sabbatical? How many years do they need to have been working (or studying) there?
2. How long can it last?
3. Is the leave paid or unpaid?
4. What can the objective of the sabbatical be? Or are they free to use their time however they like?
5. How can employees or students apply? What process do they need to follow?

### c. Write a short email with information about the sabbatical-leave policy and send it to the group.