

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 are the dangers of taking a long break from work or studies?
- Does your organisation offer paid or unpaid extended leave?
- Would you want to take an extended time off from work or studies? Why or why not?

2 Key words

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

contender guise mouth off oblivion peril remorseless titan

- danger _____
It is hard to ignore the _____ of travelling by motorbike when you look at crash statistics.
- the way that someone or something appears to people _____
Terry's always cracking a joke, but it's just a _____; he is actually very serious and committed to his engineering work.
- a person or organisation that is very important or successful _____
To some, they are tech _____, while others consider them to be entrepreneurs with too much wealth.
- not feeling sad or guilty for having done something wrong _____
It shocked everyone in court to hear the confession, spoken in such a _____ tone.

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

There are only two _____ for the CFO position. No one else is qualified enough.

6. give your opinions about something in a very annoying way, especially when you are complaining or criticising something _____

I don't sit with them at lunch because they are always _____ about how terrible their boss is.

7. a situation in which someone or something has been completely forgotten _____

After months of silence, the contractor who had provided a quote and several presentations fell into _____.

headhunt lure malaise phenomenon relentless rivalry slack off

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

An innovative education start-up _____ her.

9. an event or situation that can be seen to happen or exist

Quiet quitting is not a new _____.

10. a general feeling of being worried, unhappy, or not satisfied _____

After losing her job, she complained of insomnia and _____.

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

There has been a decade-long _____ between the two phone companies.

12. determined and never stopping in your attempts to achieve something _____

Even after several failed attempts, the research team remained _____ in their pursuit of a new formula.

13. slow down or become less _____

*Even though it's the end of the year, the accounting department cannot
_____ or take much leave.*

14. persuade someone to do something by making it look very attractive _____

*HR is trying to _____ more young talent to the company with some great
benefits packages.*

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.

Continued on next page

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.

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Pilita Clark, 3 December, 2022

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3 Understanding the article

a. Choose if each statement is (T) True, (F) False or (NG) Not Given. Correct any that are false.

1. The people mentioned in the article all disliked the jobs they had before they took sabbatical leave. T / F / NG
2. It is practically unheard of for investment bankers to take six months off for personal development. T / F / NG
3. Elhedery spent six months in China on sabbatical leave. T / F / NG
4. Nesbø started his writing career while he was a financial analyst and played guitar in a band. T / F / NG
5. Nesbø's million-dollar idea came to him on a flight to Sydney. T / F / NG
6. Benioff had his dream job at Oracle but did not feel satisfied. T / F / NG
7. Benioff spent three months at a monastery in India. T / F / NG
8. The author believes that sabbaticals are the answer to long-term employee motivation. T / F / NG
9. The author encourages people to take leave if they can, even if they don't do anything spectacular with the time. T / F / NG

4 Business language

a. Match the words to form collocations from the article.

- | | |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. brokerage | loyalty |
| 2. career | job / life |
| 3. company | analyst |
| 4. corporate | division |
| 5. financial | firm |
| 6. options | titan |
| 7. software | suicide |
| 8. tech | powerhouse |

b. Match the phrases from activity 4a to their meanings.

- something that you do that is likely to have very bad results for your career _____
- relating to working in a large company _____
- an area that works with the rights to buy or sell something in the future, for example property or stock in a company _____
- a company that organises business deals for other people _____
- a person or organisation in the technology sector that is very important or successful _____
- support that you always give to a company because of your feelings of duty towards them _____
- someone whose job is to carefully examine financial markets and events etc in order to provide other people with information about companies and investments _____
- a software company that has a lot of power or influence _____

5 Discussion questions

a. Discuss these questions.

- Whose career change in the article surprised you the most? Why?
- Do you think most people can be more successful after a sabbatical?
- How would you try to further your career or studies if you took sabbatical leave?
- What would be your greatest fear around going on extended leave?
- What arguments would you use in favour of changing your organisation's leave policy?

6 Wider business theme – HR: sabbatical leave policy and employee well-being

a. Read the benefits of offering sabbatical leave below. Which points do you find the most convincing?

According to SHRM, around 15% of US employers were offering sabbatical leave in 2018. It can be a great job perk to attract and retain talent. Sabbaticals can also reduce burnout, stress, and depression. In fact, it's a good return on investment. For every \$1 spent on mental health, there's a \$4 return in improved productivity (WHO).

Time outside the office can boost skills development for those away and the team members who have to pick up the slack. Employees usually come back with new ideas and inspiration, which can be contagious.

b. Work together to come up with a sabbatical-leave policy for your organisation. Use the questions to guide you.

1. Who is eligible to go on extended leave? How many years of service are required?
2. How long can a sabbatical last?
3. Is the leave paid or unpaid?
4. What is the purpose of the sabbatical?
5. How can employees apply? What process do they need to follow?
6. How will you measure the success of the extended-leave programme? Will you measure retention or evaluate employee development?

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