



The Pause That Refreshes

Imagine a month of mandatory paid leave. Sigh.

[Kate O'Sullivan](#), CFO Magazine

June 1, 2008

June brings with it thoughts of summer vacation, and David Hayob is unlikely to forget the one he took last year. First he traveled from his home in Houston to the East Coast with his sons, visiting four cities and attending six baseball games and three Broadway plays. Then he returned to Texas briefly before jetting off to Europe for another two weeks of R&R.

A college professor? A retiree? Hardly. Hayob is a partner in charge of accounting firm BKD's Houston office, and his month of leisure came courtesy of a mandatory sabbatical program: all BKD partners are required to take a full month off every five years, says Randy Hultz, director of human resources.

BKD forces partners — many of whom habitually struggle to leave the office behind — to truly unplug. "We basically won't talk to partners when they're on sabbatical," says Hultz. "If they call, we will not forward their phone calls. We turn off their E-mail." When clients call looking for a partner who's away, the receptionist reminds them that the person is on sabbatical and directs the call to a manager.

Hultz says the program helps ensure that partners don't get burned out and that managers and junior staffers get a chance to test their skills while a partner is away; it also gives BKD a recruiting edge.

Don't pack your bags just yet, though. Establishing a similar program within a finance department would be challenging, says Scott Simmons, vice president of recruiting firm Crist Associates. "I've never heard of a program like that at a corporate client. If you have significant responsibilities, you can't just go away for a month. I don't think it's realistic."

Neither, it seems, does Corporate America. The Society for Human Resource Management reports that just 4 percent of companies have a paid sabbatical program, while 16 percent offer an unpaid option.