
MANAGING TIME OFF

Session Description

Some ministers can spend so much time taking care of others that they forget to take care of themselves. Other categories of self-care sacrifices include over-achieving ministers and those who lack good boundaries. Today's episode is for those who neglect to take weekly days off and/or vacation time ... and for those who have a responsibility to care for or supervise them.

Session Outline

Far too many ministers are failing – and even refusing – to take their days off and the vacation time allotted them. Congregations tend to miss this fact, and it's not uncommon for a congregation to get a bit concerned when their pastor isn't in the pulpit on any given week. Either way, the pastor has a responsibility to take the time s/he needs ... and congregational leaders have a responsibility to make sure they get and take it.

- Time off is....
 - An opportunity for regeneration and renewal: Sabbath, rest, relaxation
 - Time for the minister to use at his/her leisure (otherwise it's "work")
 - Inviolable
 - Paid
- Recommended amount of time off for ministers and ministerial-type staff
 - Weekly: two days off (except on rare occasions, no more than a 50-hour work week – including Sunday!)
 - Annually: four weeks of vacation **plus** one week for spiritual renewal/retreat (regardless of how long the minister has worked there)
 - Every five years: three months sabbatical for extended rest and spiritual renewal (NOTE, this is not an academic sabbatical that requires a paper or project report at its close)
- What time off isn't....
 - Being on-call
 - Conducting any kind of church business (even funerals, weddings, hospital visits, etc.)
 - Limitless
 - Irresponsible
 - A luxury
 - Optional
- Reasons for not taking time off
 - Several *Syndromes*
 - The Workaholic Syndrome
 - The Superman / Superwoman Syndrome
 - The Perfectionist / Overly-responsible Syndrome
 - The Guilty / Fearful Syndrome
 - The Co-dependent Syndrome

- The Refusal-to-Take-Responsibility-For-Your-Own-Life Syndrome
 - The Death Wish Syndrome
- How ministers can address their particular *Syndrome*
 - Workaholic / Perfectionist / Overly-responsible
 - Believe that your to-do list will never go away
 - Remember there is no such thing as *perfect*; we can only do our best and our best is good enough (and if it isn't, you may be working in the wrong place!)
 - Schedule in/on your calendar time to engage God, yourself, your family, your friends, your hobbies (other than church, of course)
 - Set an alarm ahead of time to remind you to go home
 - The Superman / Superwoman Syndrome
 - Realize we already have a Superhero Saviour ... and it isn't you
 - Therapy
 - The Guilty / Fearful
 - Diligently manage your time wisely
 - Log and account for how you spend your time
 - Share your log with someone outside the congregation to confirm the wise/not-too-wise use of your time
 - Make course corrections as necessary
 - Teach your congregational leaders about what it means to use your time wisely (use a *Unit Chart*)
 - Allow your congregational leaders to own any problems people may have about taking your time off (time off is a policy matter, not a personal one)
 - If you are afraid of losing your job, talk to a mentor or judicatory minister *outside the congregation* for a reality check
 - The Co-dependent
 - Co-dependents Anonymous, Al-Anon
 - Therapy
 - The Refusal-to-Take-Responsibility-For-Your-Own-Life
 - Realize that if you don't take care of yourself, no one else will
 - Stop waiting for the people in your congregation to take care of you
 - Find a healthy support system (not support *person*) outside the congregation and keep regular "dates" / appointments with them
 - The Death-Wish
 - Take a hiatus from ministry
 - Therapy, therapy, therapy (do you really dislike life/your life that much ... and if you do, why are you in ministry?)
 - For all Syndromes
 - TAKE YOUR DAYS OFF – NO EXCUSES OR APOLOGIES!!!
 - Calendar, calendar, calendar in advance: use red pen on a paper calendar, if online, use a red color to make an appointment with yourself that starts at 12:01 am and goes through 11:59 pm
 - Work with an accountability partner or person (not your spouse or a member of your congregation)

- Teach your congregational leaders about the importance of rest and renewal
 - Learn to say “no,” “I can’t,” and “I won’t” (CAUTION: be very, very, very careful about how you use these outside this topic ... and say them with kindness)
- The role of congregational leaders
 - Provide adequate time off and be open to what your judicatory deems to be “adequate”
 - Hold the minister accountable more for her/his time off than you do for the number of people and visits s/he has made
 - Expect and encourage your minister to be in the office less during “slow weeks” to make up for the super-busy weeks that come with holidays, weddings and funerals, etc.
 - Teach the congregation about self-care and expect your ministers to model it
 - Protect your minister and staff from those who will hinder them from taking their time off
 - Develop an open line of communication between minister and leadership, and designate specifically who will be the communicator/s (the Vice-Chair of the administrative board, the Chair of the Pastoral Relations Committee, etc.) – REMEMBER, your minister is not the enemy
 - Contract upfront (or now if you haven’t already) an agreed amount of vacation time and any stipulations you may have about it
 - the minister provides a specific amount of advanced notice;
 - whether or not the minister will arrange for pulpit supply and/or ensure the worship components are in place
 - Whether or not the minister can “rollover” vacation to the subsequent year and the conditions under which they can do so
 - Regularly gift your minister with a weekend in a B&B, on a trip, to a professional sports game, for a massage, etc.
 - Trust your minister to be responsible (if you don’t, why is s/he your minister?)

Discussion Questions

1. Minister: When’s your next day off? When’s your next weekend off? When’s your next vacation? Sabbatical...
 - Are these dates on your calendar for the rest of the year? If “no,” why not?
 - How are you going to keep these days “sacred?”
2. Congregational Leaders: How are you going to make sure your minister takes *all* of his/her time off?
3. Congregational Leaders: How are you going to ensure you minister can take her/his time off without pressure or repercussions from the congregation?
4. Minister and Leaders: What kind of training will you provide your congregation about self-care and time off? How will you hold your minister accountable for modeling it?