

ADVICE FROM FORMER DURFEE SABBATICAL RECIPIENTS ON PREPARING FOR A SABBATICAL

Following is a list of recommendations solicited from former Sabbatical recipients on how to prepare for and what to expect from a Durfee Sabbatical. Some of the advice is contradictory, demonstrating that there are many different ways to experience the sabbatical.

Preparing Your Staff

- Decide on your interim leadership structure – a team, an acting E.D., whatever makes sense for your staff.
- Be very clear about how decisions are to be made when you are gone; create a written plan that you share with staff and board.
- Starting several months before you leave, have regular meetings with the person or team who will be taking your place to ensure a smooth transition.
- Set up a strategy for when it would be appropriate for the office to contact you in case of emergency. For example, the board chair and acting E.D. must decide in person, face to face, that it a call can not be avoided.
- Before and after: express gratitude to your staff for their support.
- If you aren't already doing it, bring staff members to board meetings so that staff and board can get to know one another.
- Have senior staff represent the organization at the outside meetings you would normally attend in the six months before you leave on sabbatical.
- Trust that your staff can handle things in your absence; don't micromanage or try to anticipate and take care of everything that might happen. Allow them to make executive decisions while you are gone. In the last month before you leave, allow your staff to make the decisions they will have to continue making in your absence.
- Write everything down for the interim leadership about whom to contact for what, where things are located, etc.
- Give a salary increase to the staff who step up to the plate while you are gone, if possible.

Preparing Your Board

- Ask a board member to be the staff liaison during the sabbatical.
- Ask board members to take turns coming to staff meetings so that they can get to know staff in a different way and vice versa. Ask board members to talk to staff about why they are involved with the organization, what their jobs are, etc.
- Let board members know that they shouldn't expect as much communication from the Interim E.D. as they normally get.

Preparing Yourself

- Remember that nothing changes much in three months.
- The last month before you leave will be difficult.
- Don't start anything new in the last month.
- Have someone to call to talk to when you are preparing to leave, maybe a former sabbatical recipient who can give you advice and support.
- Don't try to do all of the work that you normally would do during the sabbatical months (i.e., don't prepare grant proposals in advance.)

Preparing for Your Sabbatical

- Three months is short. Don't overbook yourself.
- Plan a trip for the beginning of the sabbatical. The best thing you can do is get out of town as soon as possible.
- Trip planning is a great stress reliever. Have fun with it!
- Through internet services, trade your house and car with those abroad to save money.
- Set aside time each week to focus on planning your trip and time off.
- Set up a private email account to use during sabbatical. Don't look at your work email when you are gone.
- Have someone go through your work email while you are gone, deal with what needs to be dealt with and dump the rest. Leave an automatic email message and phone message that says you will be gone for three months and that you will not read or respond to old messages when you return. The messages should direct the emailer/caller to the interim leader(s), with name and contact information.

While on Sabbatical

- Make sure you schedule some free time with no commitments.
- Don't be surprised if you experience depression at the beginning of the sabbatical as you learn to disconnect from your work identity.
- You will be exhausted at the beginning of the sabbatical, so don't try to do too much right away.
- Don't transfer your work performance compulsions to pleasurable activities. Try to throw away your list and do one thing.
- Get over the guilt of seeing the mailman, the teacher, the lady at the market who may ask why you aren't at work.
- Spend some time away by yourself.
- Take as much time as you possibly can for your sabbatical. The amount of work that it takes to get prepared to go is not much more if you are gone three months instead of two, and you don't know when you will get another opportunity like this one.

Your Return to Work

- Use your return as an opportunity to see work in a fresh way.
- When you return, everyone will seem like they are moving too fast, talking too fast, making decisions too fast.
- Have staff post news in a desktop folder so things aren't forgotten.
- No piling up of mail in inbox makes the return much easier.
- Don't overbook your return – have a “stealth week” when you are back in the office but not yet making appointments and attending meetings so you can catch up without too much stress
- Return to work on a Wednesday or Thursday so that you don't have a full week at the beginning, and go back half time for a full week or so.
- You can control your return – plan your first contacts.
- Don't let everything return to its normal crazy pace as soon as you come back. Take advantage of some of the changes that took place and make them permanent.

Life After Sabbatical

- Plan a nice vacation every year – something to play with and anticipate.
- It's okay to set boundaries around work.
- You will likely experience some depression after your return. It can be helpful to talk to another sabbatical recipient.
- Don't work weekends and late at night.
- Work hard when you're at work, then go home and forget about it.
- Stay in touch with the side of you that has nothing to do with your work – read, dance, travel, see plays, listen to music, volunteer at an organization in another field.