

# How to Profit from Play Time



**Does the question: 'When was the last time you had fun make you want to burst into tears'? If so, it's time to regroup.**

BY NINA L. KAUFMAN, Esq.

Does "play time" or "me time" seem a sinful luxury? An informal survey of women business owners indicates that play time isn't just essential to your health—it can boost your bottom line.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 99 percent of all small businesses have 20 or fewer employees, which often means owner-controlled. But control has a price: the owner's difficulty letting go so the business can run itself.

It can take a family crisis to force an owner to step back from the business and let others run it for her.

This happened to Paige Arnof-Fenn, former Marketing VP for Zipcar and Founder of Mavens & Moguls, a marketing consulting firm. In her first five years, she worked non-stop. "I thought if I went on vacation, everything would unravel," she said. In 2008, she traveled frequently to Rochester to accompany her mother to chemotherapy treatments.

"After returning home, I saw I hadn't followed up on proposals," she relates. "Ugh. I called the CEOs anyway. One said, 'Thanks for giving me time to digest your proposal. I appreciate that you didn't stalk me from the moment you sent it!' We got the job. All because we weren't 'the stalking consultants.'" Mavens & Moguls signed on 10-12 marquee clients—*during the recession*—and has continued to grow.

Similarly, when Susan Michel's mother became ill, "I told my employees I needed *their* support," Michel recounts. She shared honestly with her Glen Eagle Advisors team that she would be working different, fewer hours. "We would all be pushed out of our comfort zones. But as

a result, we got better employees. Better quality work. We've grown in revenues and financial services clients," Michel says.

Sheri Doyle also saw her staff step up when she had to step back. "They rose to the challenge for the most part," the Franklin Goose retailer says. "Those who didn't weren't right for my business. I never would have known had I not left them alone once in a while." Doyle has now made a habit of taking time off. "It helps ensure my staff is as passionate about my business as I am!"

An "intervention" awaited Pauline Guy, President of Celebrities Concierge & Staffing Services. She kept giving her husband short shrift on their agreed-upon date nights. "One time," she confides, "I had completely forgotten about our date at the Bronx Zoo. I didn't have a change of clothes. I had to walk around in 4-inch heels in the middle of a humid New York summer!" That was a turning point for Guy. "I established boundaries: no work or calls once leaving the office unless it's an emergency." Since that change, her staff is happier and more productive. And business is booming.

For some, the wee hours (4:30 or 5:00 a.m.) provide the perfect "Me time."

— Nellie Akalp

Nellie Akalp of online legal document filing service Corp.net, says "The gym is my gasoline for the day. I'm fueled for whatever comes." Kristi Royse, principal of KLR Consulting, agrees. "Treat yourself like you

would your best client," she says. "Block out time on the calendar. You wouldn't flake out on your client. Don't do that for yourself." Royse also favors the 5:00 a.m. workout "and a 6:00 p.m. glass of wine," she adds.

Rathna Sharad, co-founder of online retailer Runway2Street.com, swears by her yoga practice. "It keeps my body physically fit, clears my mind, and centers my thoughts after a day filled with highs and lows," she says. The net result? She delegates. Rathna's team has built a platform from the ground-up that's mobile-ready, and supports "anywhere-to-anywhere supply chain integration," she beams.

But what if you're not an early bird, or just can't carve out that time? "Get it however you can," says Mary Klecka, President of MAK Media, Inc., a media planning and buying firm. "Waiting for a weekend, a vacation, a Friday afternoon

doesn't help you in the moment," says Klecka. "I swear by Channel 68—the Spa Channel on Sirius XM Radio. The music relaxes me, like at a spa.


**A few minutes of deep breathing helps me reset. Focus. Set better priorities.**

— Nellie Akalp

My productivity has jumped as a result."

Yes, staff needs to be trained to handle tasks in your absence. But often, the first step is that willingness to let go. Especially if the question, "When was the last time you had fun?" makes you want to burst

into tears. "Most of us are not heart surgeons," Arnof-Fenn quips. "People can get by without you." And if her experience is anything to go by, it just might land you those marquee clients you've been seeking.

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