

EXECUTIVE VITALITY™: KNOW WHEN TO NOT WORK

Sally lost her father on a Tuesday. She is COO of a large manufacturer that was in the middle of a major product launch. Sally felt compelled to return to work on Wednesday. On Friday, she took a half day off for the funeral. The following Wednesday:

- She was too distracted to listen carefully in the senior leadership team meeting and unfortunately missed crucial information,
- She made a disastrous operating decision, and
- She fired a talented and well-liked manager who could have been coached to better performance.

Sometimes you just need to decompress, not add more pressure. It could be at the end of a long day, or a stretch of long days, weeks, or months. It could be at a time of your own personal crisis or the personal crisis of a loved one.

At times, pressure can be positive, enhancing creativity or boosting motivation, for example. But there are certain times when you must give yourself a break. If you try to work under certain conditions, like those listed above, you will make poor decisions, produce subpar work, hurt someone, or even worse. You have to “know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em.”

After you give yourself a break, you will return to work with a clearer mind, renewed energy and sense of purpose, and deeper resolve to achieve your goals. You will perform better as a person and as an executive, and you will be more emotionally stable.

Think of it this way:

INCREASING WORK DEMANDS ↑	NORMAL PERSONAL PRESSURE HIGH WORK DEMANDS	HIGH PERSONAL PRESSURE HIGH WORK DEMANDS
	It is probably not a good time to take a break as such, although a planned vacation or time off is always good for vitality and renewed work energy.	TAKE A BREAK. The extra work demands make it likely that you cannot achieve high-performance and you also run the risk of emotional overload.
	NORMAL PERSONAL PRESSURE NORMAL WORK DEMANDS	HIGH PERSONAL PRESSURE NORMAL WORK DEMANDS
	This is ... well ... normal. So, do your best at work and ensure you are taking care of your vitality just as you always should be.	Here, taking a break is a no-brainer in order to avoid emotional burnout and work ineffectiveness.
INCREASING PRESSURE →		

Further reading, both from HBR:

[Grownups Need Recess, Too](#)

[Let Yourself Be Unproductive. At Least for a Little While.](#)

Have you ever worked through times of personal crisis and regretted it later due to performance outcomes? Is there anyone on your team you should advise to take some time off?