



DISRUPTION
ADVISORS

**ARE YOU READY
TO JUMP TO
A VACATION
S CURVE?**

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As long as email has been prevalent in the workplace, there have been articles and guides on how to step away from your inbox to unplug and recharge on vacation. Particularly in the summer, myriad articles resurface on how to manage [work-life balance while on vacation](#) or urging employees to [set boundaries](#) and [take vacation](#).

But, stepping away from your inbox and taking a truly restorative vacation can feel uncomfortable or messy, much like the Launch Point on a new S Curve. Somewhere between elementary school and now, we lost the excitement and anticipation of a summer vacation, focusing only on the to-do list that awaits our return.

Here's how Disruption Advisors' CEO and co-founder Whitney Johnson prepared for a recent family vacation, and used the S Curve framework to shift her mindset.

In January, this was my out of office message —

My family doesn't think that I can unplug. If you hear from me before January 13th, they will be correct.

It has been many years since we have taken a real family vacation. Our excuse has often been we couldn't afford it. Given that vacations can range from expensive to minimal cost, this is a flimsy excuse.

The real reason we hadn't taken a vacation was that we had no idea how to jump to the vacation S Curve. We were so mired in our daily routines that we could find dozens of reasons NOT to jump.

Much to my amazement, we finally chose to do it.

It was exhilarating, inspiring, relaxing, and memorable—one of the best things we've ever done as a family. Because we had such an amazing experience, I wanted to share the lessons I learned with the hope that it will encourage you to jump to your vacation S Curve.

1. LISTEN TO YOUR LOVED ONES

Our children have been saying they wanted more family time and more family experiences. Awesome requests but we weren't listening. Because of our focus on business and our lack of understanding (or maybe fear) of how to make the jump into the unknown (especially of being unplugged for an extended length of time), we hesitated. We were creating our own future [Cat's in the Cradle](#) moment: "We'll have a real good time then...."

When your loved ones ask for more time together, listen.

2. BE OPEN TO OPPORTUNITY

Opportunities are all around and appear when you least expect them. You simply have to recognize them and be willing to say "yes."

Erik and Emily Orton ([Disrupt Yourself #101](#)) wrote *Seven at Sea*, a book about their shoestring adventure on a sailboat. They scrimped and saved for five years before sailing the Caribbean as a family, including their youngest who has Down Syndrome. When I interviewed them, I suggested they make similar experiences available to businesses and families.

After our conversation, Erik and Emily decided to experiment with the idea. They offered to host our family for a few days sailing in the Caribbean at a deeply discounted rate. We covered all the reasons why we should say no, but we decided our answer was "YES."

Jumping to a new S Curve is ultimately a leap of faith. There will always be legitimate reasons to say no to an opportunity, but it is usually a much better choice to find reasons to say "yes."

3. MANAGE YOUR FEARS

I've had several vacations derail because I was uncomfortable with being in a different place doing different things with different people. I had to deliberately manage my fear of facing unfamiliar, awkward situations if I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity that had presented itself. My mantra before and during was, "I can jump to this new S Curve. It may be uncomfortable, but I can do this."

Being on vacation doesn't mean you are carefree. Recognize this and acknowledge that you will be at the launch point of the S Curve. This puts your logical brain in charge, quieting your lizard brain. You can do this.

4. HAVE A PLAN AND BE FLEXIBLE

Plans were made. The trip would launch in Tortola, but because of the pandemic, there were heavy travel restrictions that had to be met to ensure we were COVID-free. This required coordination with government authorities – an arduous process.

Even with careful planning, there were situations where rigidity and serious discomfort could have derailed us. Because people aren't traveling, the airline changed our flights several times. Because of testing requirements, we had to leave earlier than expected. Accepting these circumstances and being flexible enough to go with the flow saved us. We had to remind ourselves "We can figure it out!"

One of the ways you manage fear is by having a plan and then planning to be flexible. Planning gives you confidence and mitigates risk. Planning is your roadmap, but flexibility is what gets you to your destination. When you are prepared, you have confidence that you can find a way.

Note: For more on the importance of learning to adapt, listen to my conversation with world-renowned management thinker Roger Martin ([Disrupt Yourself #194](#))

5. CHOOSE YOUR COMPANIONS WISELY

Jumping to the Launch Point of a vacation **S Curve** (or any curve!) that requires doing things you have never done before can be extremely difficult if you are trying to impress someone, so consider carefully who you choose as companions.

I knew Erik and Emily would be wonderful hosts, but given that the boat could sleep 10-11 people, who else could we invite? My lifelong childhood friend, Kathleen Peterson, her husband, and three children joined us.

Like the rigging of the sailboat, vacationing with the right people provides emotional rigging.

Choose people with whom you can have a bad hair day (which for me, was every day!) and still enjoy yourself. Psychological safety is important wherever you are . . . at home, at work, even on vacation.

6. BUILD IN TRANSITION TIME

This is a step that is often overlooked. We certainly didn't plan for it, but thankfully it was given to us. The four-day quarantine in Tortola was a gift of time that allowed us to wind down from the intensity of our work lives and relax into a vacation pace. By the time we sailed, we were fully present physically, mentally, and emotionally for the adventure.

Just like you transition at the beginning or end of a day, at the beginning or end of a week, plan for transition time into and out of your vacation.

7. UNPLUG COMPLETELY

This is critical. If you don't do anything else, do this – no phones, no computer, no email. If you need inspiration for this new and scary step, listen to Syd and Shae McGee, owners of Studio McGee ([Disrupt Yourself #187](#)) who took a vacation but couldn't vacate.

Anxiety diminishes when you unplug. Being present and focused with minimal distractions lowers the stress of doing something new. Also, research suggests that your IQ goes up when you unplug, which is a good thing to remember when jumping to any new S Curve.

8. STAY ON PURPOSE

The purpose of a vacation is to vacate your typical life and do something different for a few days to a few weeks. It may be going on a grand adventure filled with activity (*doing*) – or it may be time to do as little as possible (*resting*). Our sailing vacation was a lovely combination of both.

We weren't just passengers on a sailboat, we were actively immersed in the adventure of sailing. We *helped* cast off, raise the sail, and drop anchor. We *learned* nautical terms like telltale (those small ribbons on a sail aren't to patch up the sail, they tell you which way the wind is blowing). We *socialized* with our family, the Orton's, and with the Peterson's, which heightened the sense of occasion.

We also stayed on *purpose*. In advance, the Ortons gave us an assignment to ask ourselves questions, like “What do I want more of/less of?” These questions were the jumping-off point for evening conversations and learning—using the day’s experience as a metaphor.

The vacation checked all the boxes: physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual. Unexpected and perfect.

Decide on your purpose—why are you going on vacation? Do you need to rest? Are you looking forward to sharing time and activities with dear friends? Do you want to create wonderful memories with your family? Ideally, you’ll probably want a little bit of everything – resting, doing, learning, socializing, making memories, and more.

9. TAKE PICTURES & DOCUMENT

Everyone experiences and sees things differently. Images are a wonderful way to capture each individual’s perspective. What did others see that you didn’t? Multiple perspectives will make the memories even richer.

Documenting your vacation will memorialize your experience. This not only allows you to remember the details and feelings; it also primes your brain to do more of what you want to do—including having meaningful experiences with people you love.

10. CELEBRATE YOUR EXPERIENCE

Celebrate everything that happened by using all your senses as you document the vacation. Sight is the easiest one to access because of the pictures taken, but don’t forget to think in terms of touch, sound, taste, and smell.

Rooster call and response. Feet squishing in the sand. Falling asleep in the sun. Beachcombing—picking up a brain coral right after reading about the brain. Swabs up my nose. Underwater stillness. Lobster dipped in butter. Salt in the air. Creaking gears. Sails flapping and unfurling. Closeness. Happiness. These are a few of the wonders I experienced.

Capturing the adventure by documenting your sensory experiences will be a gift for your future self. You think you will remember, but memories shift and fade with time – don’t let that happen.

11. BUILD IN TIME FOR RE-ENTRY

We also did not plan for re-entry, but the universe did it for us. Due to limited travel options, it took us longer than expected to get home, for which I am grateful. I had time to think, to process, and to stay on the vacation a little longer.

Give yourself 1-2 days of transition time upon re-entry. If you have a big presentation coming up, get home several days ahead of time. Or prepare before you leave. If you prepare well, the effects of your vacation will last. If not, you may find that you quickly become more stressed than when you left.

12. LOOK FOR STORIES

Look for stories or metaphors that you want to share later. Vacation experiences are wonderful for gathering stories you can tell friends and extended family and even use professionally. Stories are great teaching tools.

One of my favorite stories from our sailing adventure was the opportunity to climb the mast, which by-the-way is not easy and very scary. But I knew that I would regret it if I didn't try. I only got halfway up; the ropes were rubbing against my arms and with me flapping about, the sails weren't the only thing unfurling.

Had there been time to go again, continuing to test this new S Curve, I would have known to wear a long-sleeved shirt and to hug the pole, moving quickly and deliberately to the mast. Our friend, Will, who had watched me closely learned from my experience and did exactly that. He went directly to scooching up koala-like up, which took him closer to the top than I had gotten but was halted a few feet from his goal because of twisted rope. By watching and learning from Will, Julia, his sister, made it to the top of the mast. Experience was our teacher and for the group it got easier and faster for each person as they climbed this new challenging S Curve.

Learn from everything you do! – regardless of the outcome. In the past, it was not unusual for us to schedule family weekends that I canceled at the last minute or spent the entire time working. This time was different. I kept my word and have learned to trust myself more. My dreams are now a little bigger just as Erik said during one of the evening conversations on the boat, “The size of your dreams is in proportion to how much you trust yourself.”

We understand the importance of taking a step back to recharge in order to slingshot forward. If you're a people manager looking to provide your team with an opportunity to reconnect, realign, and reimagine, don't wait to participate in a Disruption Advisors offsite.

Email us at workwithus@thedisruptionadvisors.com to learn more.