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Traveling Light

Skills and Professional Development



Before 9/11, in the days when you could still stand at the airport gate to send people off, and even watch their plane depart, and checked luggage did not equal the cost of a half-day per diem; I prided myself in what I could fit into my suitcase. I grew up with a souvenir-collecting mother and “inherited” that trait. I assembled quite a collection of t-shirts, souvenir spoons (does anyone even know what these are anymore?), kitchen magnets and other wonderful tchotchkes. Those were carefree days of throwing caution to the wind and sitting on top of the suitcase to close it, with no worries of extra weight charges.

Another fond travel memory I have includes the near-miraculous ability to release every care and worry of daily life, literally the minute I embarked the plane. The sound of jet noise was truly the sound of freedom, and it brought the anticipation of new adventures. During the flight I would leaf through my travel books and brochures, in preparation for the adventure. As the plane approached the destination, my excitement became palpable. I could feel my adrenaline increase when the plane landed. I was insatiably curious about what awaited me beyond the landing gate.

At what point all that changed, I honestly couldn't tell you. But it did. Much like the experience of looking in a mirror and realizing that you are no longer 16, 21, 35 or even 40 anymore; shifts occur in your life landscape and suddenly, you are living with different habits and exercising a different mode of operation.

With the advent of baggage fees and extra airport screening processes, I have been forced to learn to travel light. Easier said than done. As my external baggage accumulated through the years, my internal baggage had also quietly increased.

When I first received a laptop for company travel, it felt like a badge of honor — to be connected that

easily, to be needed that much. I bought into the notion that having your laptop with you so that you could work on the road was a mark of true importance. How naive we all were. Thanks to the technological advances of laptops and mobile devices, we never have to unplug. Ever. We never have to leave work. We can always be available in case of “emergency.” It is good to be indispensable, right?

As the saying goes, you are what you eat and you act based on how you think. So although we may carry less physical baggage, the mental baggage we take along with us even on vacation takes much longer to unpack, and traveling light, well... just isn't. How many of us are not really “present” with our traveling companions, our spouses, our kids until at least day two or three of a vacation?

We need to proactively assert weight limits on our time. Our real value to the organization does not rise or fall based on how many calls we take at the beach or on top of a ski slope. If we do not give ourselves the freedom to play well, WE and we alone are the ones who ultimately pay for that sacrifice. This holds true even for those of us that are “solo” legal departments.

Oftentimes, it may not even be the “Company” who puts these kinds of demands on us; it's something we inflict upon ourselves. It will not “all burn down without me” in a day or even a week. Absent a truly catastrophic event, you can spare a week or even two (did I just say that?) to “take off the weight” and lighten the load.

“Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.”

— Andre Gide

We need to hang up, leave behind or cut the electronic leashes that hamper our ability to free our minds and our time. We have to remember that EVERY trip is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Moments cannot really be relived exactly the same way. Even though you can return to a place time and again, the eyes that you see it with WILL and DO change. So let's all unpack as much baggage as possible, BEFORE we leave. Only by doing that can we travel light and “lose sight of the shore.”

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