

#108: You Can Take a Sabbatical



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Marissa McKool, MPH

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with Marissa McKool, MPH](#)

#108: You Can Take a Sabbatical

Hey you all, I'm Marissa McKool, and you're listening to the *Redefining Rest Podcast for Public Health Professionals*. Here we believe rest is your right. You don't have to earn it, you just have to learn how to take it and I'm going to teach you. Ready? Come along.

Hello, hello, hello there. I am so glad you are joining me. Welcome if you are new here or you're a recent listener. I am so glad you're here. However you found this podcast, through LinkedIn or Instagram or a friend sending it to you. I want to remind you and encourage you to hit that subscribe button. With podcasts, especially in Apple Podcasts, this happens to me all the time. I get sent an episode or a podcast or I find it and I listen to an episode, I really like it and I don't remember to subscribe. And then I go back and I try to find it and I can't.

It's not like other platforms. YouTube, I'll start watching a channel and I don't subscribe and it's not a problem because all of a sudden my YouTube feed is just all those content creators or that channel's videos which is probably not very good for the content creators but good for me as the user. Podcasts are not the same. It's hard to find a podcast if you haven't subscribed unfortunately. So make sure to hit that subscribe button, it takes two seconds. I just want to share that helpful reminder because I know, I love when I get those, when people share those.

And I'm like, "Yeah, I should do that so I don't lose this." And then get frustrated later. I will tell you all, this has been a long day. I don't know how your day is going. If you're listening to this on Monday, end of the day driving home or maybe midweek, but man, today has been a day for me. It's towards the end of the day. When this is over I'm going to go for a walk because I really need it. There have been things, some exciting things that have happened and some oopsies I have made.

Also I have rewritten this episode three times and this is the second time I'm recording it. Normally I just write an episode, I set kind of learning

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objectives, outlines and then record it and we're all good. But I just think because I recently took my sabbatical and I'm still thinking about it so much and I really feel passionate about other people being able to take sabbaticals that I just really wanted to make sure I can articulate and share with all of you the things I think would be really helpful for you.

So I think I've got it nailed, dialed down, don't worry, really, really glad you're here because if this is your first episode, this is going to be a good one for you to listen to because the goal today is to help you see and believe that you can take a sabbatical, time for yourself, extended leisure time, not medical leave, not parental leave, although it's good to take those if you need them, not just that one week vacation a year but extended time off. In April of 2023, this year I took the whole month off. I didn't work. I had no coaching calls. I didn't check email.

I wasn't on social media, maybe two minutes a week, but really that was it. I did this part of my rest practice as those of you who have been listening for a while in our community. You know I believe rest is a practice just like meditation or yoga or anything else, it's lifelong, it's fluid. And rest is different week to week, month to month, different stages of your life. And I decided in the beginning of 2023, actually probably the end of 2022 that this year I would be taking all of April and all of October off. I called it a sabbatical.

Now, this term is used in academia and tech in different ways, slightly different ways. In academia it's typically for a certain tenured faculty or different faculty members to take a semester or a year to write a book or do research. In tech it's often available to staff after working there a certain amount of years. And it's viewed more as a respite even if they won't say that, it really is, the way they have it structured. Both those fields really have an earn it approach which you all know how I feel about that. Boo, thumbs down.

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You do not have to earn your rest. We are taught this. It's not true. A lot of systems promote that, even public health and all of those systems in my opinion need to change.

Tricia Hersey, hopefully pronouncing her last name right. She's the founder of *Nap Ministry*, author of *Rest As Resistance*. I highly recommend that book if you haven't read it. It's a really good read. Her work aligns really well with my work. There's only a few things I kind of differ with on, but I highly recommend. In that book she talks about when she took a month off. I don't know if she still does this practice but she called it a sabbath.

Trudi Lebron, she's an equity coach, educator. I don't know if they're still doing this. I haven't been in touch as much recently, but I know last year they were doing their whole company, every eighth week they would take the whole week off, the company would shut down. And that would be through the whole year. So that's a different kind of format of a sabbatical. The word 'sabbatical' actually originates from the Greek word, sabbatikos which means of the sabbath. Sabbath is the word often used in religious contexts for meaning day of rest.

No matter what you call it, sabbath, sabbatical, extended rest, it's really about having dedicated intentional time to rest and not just a day, not just a week but more expansive time or more consistent ongoing time in nature. And you can take that extended rest too. That's really what I want you to see by the end of this episode. Some of you already believe it and you're excited and you're inspired and that's great. And some of you are intrigued and interested but don't really believe it. And I really want you to consider the possibility that it is true that you can too.

It wasn't just because I own my own business that I could do this. In fact a lot of business coaches probably would think I was nuts for doing this. And many business owners probably would be too worried because that's a whole month of not having income. I took three weeks off when I worked in

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academia when I was a staff member. I didn't own my own business and I took those three weeks off in an environment where I wasn't a faculty so I wasn't entitled to sabbatical.

Most of the colleagues I had, they were losing their PTO because the culture, the norm was actually not to take vacation. And I still was able to take those three weeks off. When I worked, before I got my MPH I actually worked in social work at an estate agency and I remember one of the therapists there, he took a whole month off using his PTO. And so many people at the office, I think I was 22 at the time or something, 21. So many people at the office were shook by this.

And I remember just being in awe and so inspired and starting then to believe it could be possible. And I'll get to this later because it's such an important part of it is to just believe it's possible. Part of that is having examples, while part of that is creating your own belief too. Taking extended time off that's just for leisure happens all the time. You might not see it, but it does and you can too. Why take a sabbatical? No matter how you structure it, you want to take it just because you want to. It's fun.

Maybe it's to be with your kids over the summer or maybe it's to travel or maybe it's to spend more time in your garden or to learn how to bake or because life is too short to constantly be working. You don't have to wait till retirement. That is the biggest scam by toxic capitalism, that you have to hustle, hustle, hustle. And then there is this light at the end of the rainbow where all of a sudden, you fully get to finally relax.

Does anyone think it's weird that the structure is based on, when you're towards the end of your life, where your physical capacity is changing, where your mental capacity, then we'll give you permission to just enjoy it? Rather than let's integrate this throughout your life when you are younger, when you have kids, when you have the capacity to do certain exciting things you want to do. You can start experiencing that deep extended rest

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now even if culturally we promote this idea of you have to wait till retirement or you have to earn it.

Sabbaticals are intentional, they're by design. They're not reactive, they're planned, they're thoughtful. They can be expansive and joyful and exciting and beautiful and such an important part of connecting with yourself, of being present in your life, of really embracing life, of doing things you've always wanted to do. Sabbaticals are not a treatment plan though, and this is really important, they're really more a part of a rest practice. Sabbaticals aren't respite. Respite really is a break, a relief from something.

When I worked at that social work agency, we would give parents, caregivers of children or adolescents who had various medical or behavioral or mental health needs, respite, a break from caregiving. That is very different than a sabbatical. If you are overworking, if you're burning out, what you would be taking isn't a sabbatical, it would be respite to recover. Sabbaticals are not about that. Sabbaticals don't solve for the problem that creates overworking and burn out.

And in fact, respites don't either, respite is just addressing a symptom, not the root of the problem. That's a full discussion for another day. But I want to state this because if you plan a sabbatical expecting that you'll be able to recover from burnout and overworking, you take a month off, you take three weeks off or whatever it is and then you go back to work and expect everything to be different. And walking into work with similar circumstances and challenges and barriers, you're going to be very disappointed because you're going to end up overworking and burning out again.

Because that is not what sabbaticals do for you. Sabbaticals are really a time for you to enjoy the things you want to enjoy on a deeper, more expansive level. So on my sabbatical I went to Europe for 10 days. I baked a lot of new recipes. I cooked more complex meals for fun. I didn't have to rush through it. I didn't need to make a 30 minute meal. I could spend a

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couple of hours. I binge watched TV. I went to museums by myself. I love going to museums, you all, but not with other people. I think they just ruined it. I like to go by myself. I tried new restaurants. I took longer walks among other things.

You can take a sabbatical too and do some of those same things or different things. Maybe your desire for what to do is different than mine. Maybe why you want to do it is different. Maybe what you do is different, but you can take it and you don't have to earn it or justify it. You can enjoy it. It's available to you. Sabbaticals can be amazing, truly they can be rejuvenating, expansive, fun but it's also important to note they are 50/50. You're still going to have some negative emotions. There will still be challenges and that's okay. They're still so worth it.

I don't want you to go into it expecting it will just be sunshine and rainbows and then a challenge comes up or you suddenly feel some guilt or shame and then you're like, "I'm doing it wrong." No, it's still 50/50. It's just like any other part of life. Doesn't mean you don't do it. What do you want to do on your sabbatical? What will you learn from your sabbatical? How will it help you deepen your relationship with yourself? How will it further invite you, detach from hustle culture?

Coming back from my month off, back into work I realized for me it really became a deep practice and challenging the notion of 'enough'. And I didn't know it would be going into it but I was open to learning from the sabbatical in addition to having fun and traveling and all that other stuff. So many of us unconsciously believe that rest has to be earned, that we have to do 'enough' before we can eat our lunch or leave the office or go on vacation.

I coach so many women in public health who feel guilty at the end of the day because they didn't get enough done. And then they get overwhelmed thinking about having to get it done tomorrow, whether it's at their job or at home or in another area. On my month off I really was invited kind of to

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challenge that notion of enough on a deeper level. And coming back I am trying to be more intentional about slowing down, not being in a rush, recognizing when my brain wants to react urgently to non-urgent things, being present and not getting distracted.

Redirecting my brain when it wants to constantly think ahead. Reminding myself I don't have to do it all. I'm working to integrate that deeper into my life. Now, it's really important to set your expectations for what a sabbatical is not. A sabbatical is not a magic pill that solves for hustle culture, trust me, I wish it was, because I would give everyone prescriptions. I'm not a doctor, but I would give them rest prescriptions to go on a sabbatical if it really was a magic pill or solution or treatment but it's not. And I really want to be clear and transparent with you all.

And to enjoy your sabbatical on a deep level, it's really important that you do work on your relationship with hustle culture which by the way, all of you are doing by being here listening to this. But I want to talk about this because what can happen, you take a month off expecting that all of a sudden you'll have no kind of chasing productivity or hustling to get it all done and all that stuff. You just have an expectation it will be easy and perfect. And then you'll go on sabbatical and you'll end up hustling, trying to get all your chores done or all your projects done.

Or a sabbatical might feel really good and easy and then you go back to work expecting everything will be great, now I know how to rest. Now I'm so peaceful, now I'm so relaxed. And you go back to work, the same challenges are at work, the same circumstances, the same barriers. And then you're like, "What the fuck, why is this happening?" It's because sabbaticals are not a treatment or a cure for hustle culture, your internalization hustle culture unfortunately, trust me, if it was I would sell that shit and become a millionaire.

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So let's talk a little bit about what does it mean to detach from hustle culture. It really means building awareness of where you are hustling, where you are chasing productivity, where you are grinding, not giving yourself permission to rest, overworking. Being able to see that you are attaching value to how much you do. You're unable to really be present and rest and give yourself permission. And you all are doing this. You're building this awareness by being here listening.

Another piece of it is actually gaining tools and implementing and practicing them in your day-to-day life to change that experience. For those of you who have taken any of my courses or who have hired me as your coach, you got these in depth, at different levels of course but you've gotten these tools and implemented them and seen those changes. And you can implement the stuff I teach on the podcast too on your own, totally. That's also an option for you.

But part of the way this looks, it can include lots of things from knowing how to set and hold boundaries, how to manage your mind, how to not people please, how to process your emotions so that when you take a sabbatical and you get an email or text on your sabbatical from your team saying, "Hey, we're having this issue, can you help out?" You don't get upset. You don't get mad at them for texting you. You accept, hey, I set a boundary, it's not their job to uphold it. I can't force them to change.

The boundary is my responsibility and you can hold firm to that boundary and decide confidently not to respond or respond saying, "Hey, I can't", and not feel guilt. Doing that work on hustle culture is important so that when you take that extended leave, before you leave if someone says, "Hey, by the way, I know you're going out but can you come to this meeting in a couple of weeks", you don't say yes out of guilt. You won't people please. You'll be able to confidently decline without worrying what they'll think of you or making it mean you're not doing enough or lazy or shouldn't be taking this leave.

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Now, listen, this doesn't mean you have to be 100% detached from hustle culture to take and benefit from a sabbatical. Listen, no one will ever be. I've been doing this for years. I'm a rest coach. I do not perfectly detach from hustle culture. I still catch myself making way too long a to-do list. Actually that happened today. I had to move some stuff to tomorrow. My brain still tells me I need to get more done, I didn't get enough done. So I don't want you to think you can't do this until you've gotten to that place of enlightenment and perfection.

No, that's absolutely not true and there's no such thing. That's impossible. Your sabbatical also doesn't have to look the way mine did. I'm taking another month off in October. But next year in 2024 I don't know if I'm going to continue this. I loved it. I loved it way more actually surprisingly than I thought I would. I knew I would enjoy it but man, I enjoyed it so much more than I thought on the actual sabbatical. And now coming back to work I'm having so many aha moments. So it's really been such an amazing experience for me.

But next year I might try something different. I might take the last week of each month off through the whole year or another structured extended time off. You can take a sabbatical whatever way you want. You can get creative. So with that in mind I was thinking about some of the things that have helped me take extended time off, feeling confident without guilt, the things that would help you do that. And there's kind of three core things I came up with.

The first is practicing detaching from hustle culture, which I've talked a lot about on this episode, so I won't go on in much more detail.

The second is believing it is possible. If you doubt it's possible you'll never make it happen. You're going to have to figure out the how based on your situation and your circumstance. Your job, your boss, your organization, the policy, your family life, your finances, all that stuff is different than mine.

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Heck, my circumstances now, way different than it was when I took three weeks off in, what, 2019. It doesn't mean you can't do it. It just means you have to figure out the how, how you can do it in your current circumstance.

Figuring out the how isn't a problem. It doesn't have to be scary. But in order to figure out the how you have to believe it's possible for you. You have to believe you can figure it out. To believe so deeply that it's possible and you can take extended time off, that you still believe even if someone doubts you, even if someone questions you, even if someone says, "Hey, no, that's not going to happen." So you can keep going, so you can figure it out. So you don't get defeated. So you don't stop trying.

It would be like if someone wanted to run a marathon but doubted they could, they would never ever end up running for that marathon because their brain would shut down any ideas for how. They might think maybe I should hire a running coach. And then their brain would say, "No, it's a waste of money because you probably won't follow through." Or maybe they have an idea about, maybe I should start with a 5K. And then their brain would say, "No, we don't really have time to train for that."

If you don't believe you won't use your time and energy or effort to figure out the how no matter what other people think. And you 100% can take a sabbatical. I believe it with all my heart, every bone in my body. You just have to believe it. And if you aren't in full belief yet, borrow my belief, use me as an example. I did it when I worked in academia. One of the most hustle culture places in the world, this specific school and department, the kind of notion of self-sacrifice and overworking and burning out was rampant.

And I figured out how to do it, not because I'm a special snowflake, not because I'm smarter than you at all. I guarantee you, most of you here are way smarter than me. I just believed, I just believed it was possible so deeply that I was willing to figure it out. That's all you have to do, borrow my

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belief. If you're not there yet, I give it to you freely because I want this for you and I know it's possible for you.

The third piece is you have to plan. Now, belief is a big part of the planning because you need time. You need intention. You need strategy to plan. If you don't believe you're not going to do that work. So belief is a big piece of it. The third piece is to plan because if you don't plan it won't happen, just like anything else. No one else is going to make this happen for you. You have to and you have to plan ahead. Your plan will probably look different than mine, that's okay.

And listen, I want to be clear, this is not about denying that some circumstances make certain aspects of taking a sabbatical easier. I am my own boss currently. So I didn't need anyone's approval to take a month off. That piece might have been easier for me because of that. But also I don't have anyone to cover for me. I don't have staff. So if a building go through or my account contacted me because there was taxes and say, "Hey, the IRS had an issue with this", or something else truly urgent came up, I don't have someone to cover for me.

You might, you might have colleagues or a team member who can, making that piece potentially easier for you, where I had to figure out some other things. There is no perfect situation for a sabbatical, not in the current world we live in and that's okay, you can figure it out, you can plan for it. You can get the logistics, you can prepare for potential situations. And yeah, some things might fall through the cracks or not go as planned, that is okay. I cannot tell you your specific how because I don't live in your circumstances, you do.

But when you believe you can figure out the how before you have evidence or approval. When you believe that you can figure out the how then you have the mental and emotional capacity because you're not in your mind doubting yourself or questioning yourself. You can use that energy instead

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to figure out the logistics and how to plan and what you need to get done and what you're going to do. Your how might look totally different than mine.

Maybe instead of taking a whole month off, you decide I'm going to take the last week of each month in the summer off. So the last week of June, last week of July, last week of August to be with your kids. Maybe for you, you're going to accept a new job offer and you decide, hey, I'm going to negotiate the start date so I get three weeks off, four weeks off between leaving this job and starting the new one. Maybe for you, you decide you know what, I'm going to save up money and in a year quit and just travel. I don't know. I don't know your how.

It's not my job to tell you how. It's my job to tell you that it's possible, that you are resourceful, you can figure it out. I believe in you, no matter what, you can make it happen. It might look different than the way I did it, that's okay. It might not happen right away, that's okay, but it can happen. You can make it happen, I believe in you and you just have to believe in it too.

Now, again, I shared on Instagram I was going to do this podcast and some of you messaged me. And the most common question was, "Well, how did you tell your boss?" Meaning you are worried about how to tell your boss. I promise you when you believe it's possible, you'll figure out how to tell your boss. Your boss is different than the boss I used to have. Your circumstance is different. Your job is different. I can't tell you how.

If you're worried about telling your boss then you either need to do a little more work on detaching from hustle culture, your belief you have to earn it or justify your rest. Or you have to really deepen your belief that it's possible. Or you have to make a more detailed plan to figure out the how. You work on those three things, I promise you'll be able to figure out the how that works best for you. And you don't have to be in a rush. There is

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no urgency here. You find yourself feeling like you have to rush to take the sabbatical.

You're probably seeking the sabbatical for respite believing it will solve for your overworking and feeling exhausted and overwhelm. And if that's the case, I want you to schedule a consult with me. We can talk about my coaching program and how that can help you resolve that. Because I promise, a month off is not going to resolve that. You can figure out how to tell your boss, how to afford it, how to structure it, what you need to delegate to make it happen, what plan you need to put into place. And you can figure out what you want to do on your sabbatical.

Do you want to bake? Do you want to travel? You can structure it. You can plan for it. You can leave time to be flexible. All of the how you can figure out once you believe it's possible. You make a plan and you do your work to detach from hustle culture, not completely, not perfectly because that's impossible but just notice if you're worried about how to do it, where are you believing you have to earn it or you have to justify it? Where are you worrying what other people will think? Where are you telling yourself you're going to burn bridges?

Notice what's going on in your thinking and take some time to explore that. Now, I will say, you don't have to call it a sabbatical. When you do go through whatever format to talk to your boss or request it, however your job is set up, you don't have to call it a sabbatical. You can just request to take time off in whatever language you want to use that works best for you or your organization's lingo or your boss or whatever. So I will say that, you don't need to use the term, sabbatical.

The last thing, for those of you who are thinking about this, and one of the things you know you might have to do. If you're already thinking about the how is to delegate either before you leave or during your leave. I have a free masterclass that will help you with that, called How to Delegate to

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Reduce Your Workload. It's 15 minutes. It's delivered right to your inbox. And it will help you delegate without feeling guilty, without worrying about burdening someone else, without telling yourself it's not their job, you should do it, all that bullshit.

I'm going to teach you the five simple steps to delegate so you can reduce your workload, reduce your to-do list so you can be able to make a plan to take time off for a sabbatical or even just a one week vacation. So I want you to go to mckoolcoaching.com/courses, put in your name and your email. The course will be sent directly to your inbox. It's 15 minutes. You can watch it in less than your lunch break. And I give you tips and tools and knowledge and skills in order to become more confident delegating, whether or not you're a supervisor.

Even if you don't manage staff, I talk about that in there too and how you can use the skill, the tool of delegation to have more time, reduce your workload which I promise will help you with taking time off, with taking a vacation, with taking PTO, with taking a sabbatical. So mckoolcoaching.com/courses. With that you all, I'm going to head out. I hope you have a great week and I'll talk to you next week.

If you found this episode helpful then you have to check out my coaching program where I provide you individualized support to create a life centered around rest. Head on over to mckoolcoaching.com, that's M-C-K-O-O-L coaching.com to learn more.