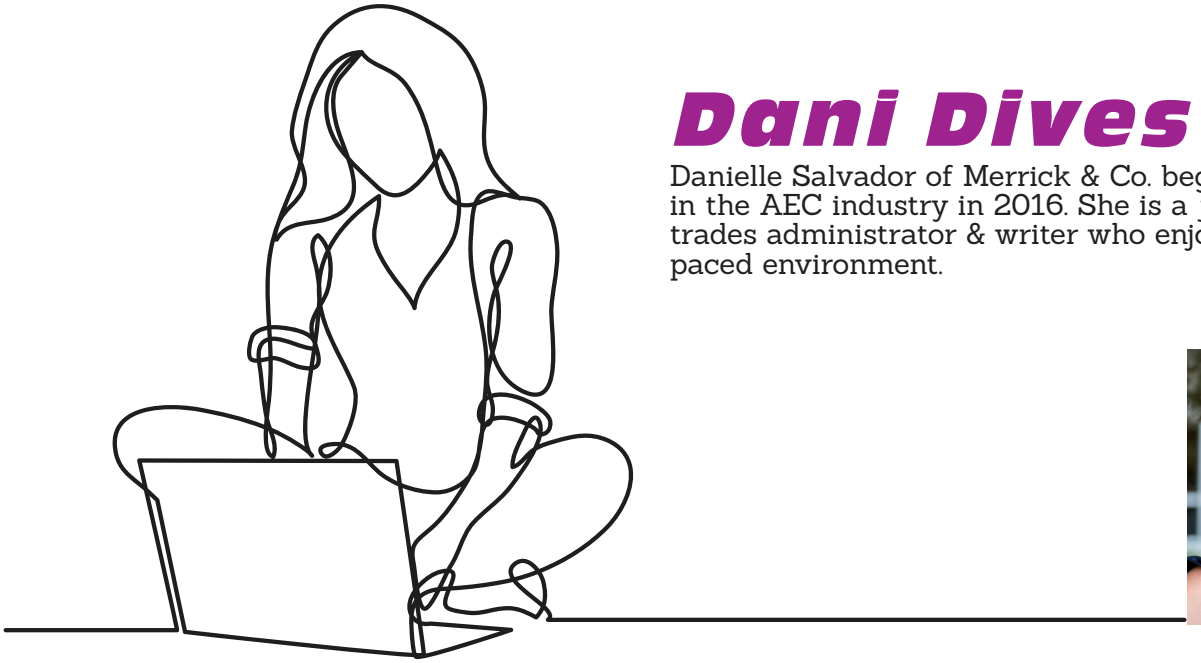


Dani Dives In

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Summer Vacation Here We Come: Tips to Reduce Out of Office Worrying

Summertime means vacations are approaching! Planning a trip takes coordinating a ton of moving parts. I'm always worried I won't bring enough socks; do you have that one small & irrational thing you're always worried about when packing? Forgetting things on vacation creates its own set of necessary stress; so, this article will review a few helpful ways to prepare to be fully and completely "Out of Office" that will decrease anxiety about any loose ends you didn't tie up before you left.

Notifying your team should be the first thing you do when you decide to make that vacation official. Ideally this is months to weeks before you're out of the office. Put your vacation on your calendar and any other team/PTO calendars your office has. If you are using Outlook, when you make the appointment use the top ribbon under "Options" and select Show As: "Out of Office". With this option marked, anyone viewing your calendar can see you are not just "Busy" in a meeting but that you are going to be unreachable for a certain number of days. Don't forget to share your vacation days with your boss and your team, however your place of business has established that information-sharing policy. At our office we use a shared PTO calendar. With a shared calendar everyone can see when someone else will be out of the office without having to bug a teammate or wonder why your third email request is being ignored.

As your vacation gets closer, keep an eye on your out of office dates when accepting meeting invites & scheduling appointments. If you marked your calendar appointment as "Out of Office" then it will notify the person inviting you to the meeting that you are out & suggests they pick another meeting time. On your end, the calendar preview inside the meeting invite will show you that you're out of office so you can respond to the invite accordingly.

When you're a week away from being out, make sure to remind your team of the start date & duration of your absence. One week before leaving is also a good time to take a look at your calendar for routine duties that need to be assigned to someone else in your absence. Designate your time-sensitive tasks to a coworker while you're away. Get with your supervisor if you don't know who that should be. They will appoint someone to take over your duties and give approval for some tasks to wait until you get back.

Lastly, update your out of office "away message". An away message is that automatic kick-back email that responds to every email you get with a note telling others you are unavailable. We've all seen them. These away messages help continue the workflow without your inbox being a giant black hole and giant mess when you get back. You can set up the out of office message on a delay so that you don't have to remember to set it up the day before you leave. Set up your away message as soon as you remember to do it; then, adjust the settings so the messages kick on the first day you're out and continue sending throughout the duration of your vacation. In the away message include the people taking over your duties and provide their contact information. It is also helpful to put the duration of your vacation, so people know when to expect you back to work. Having an away message puts the necessary buffer between your vacation and your work. It directs people to the available staff or lets them know when to expect a response. This will greatly decrease the number of times your coworkers will reach out or bug you about something work-related.

This article was focused on vacation since summertime is coming in hot, however you can use these tips for any out of office scenario. Remember to tie up the loose ends mentioned in this article before you log off for a more successful and stress-free out of office experience.