

Philanthropy: Yes, Your Donations Also Fund Foundation Employees' Vacations

Philanthropie: oui, vos dons financent aussi les vacances des employés de fondations

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This is an AI-generated English translation of Daniel H. Lanteigne's original French-language column, provided for reference. Read the original in French on Les Affaires → <https://www.lesaffaires.com/opinions/philanthropie-oui-vos-dons-finacent-aussi-les-vacances-des-employes-de-fondations/>

Like many of you, you probably savour the moment you set your out-of-office auto-reply—one of the last milestones confirming that your summer vacation has finally arrived. But for nonprofit executive directors, it can be a delicate exercise. Every word has to be weighed carefully. Heaven forbid a donor should imagine they're paying for a few days away from the office for someone who's been running on empty for months.

Vacation? Paid for with my donation? Alert the media, quick!

Rest assured. It's probably not a private villa on the Amalfi Coast—which, frankly, would be well deserved. More likely, it's a few days, often hard to take in the first place, during which this person will try not to check their email before 7:30 a.m.

"I am currently out of the office with limited access to email. I will review your message as soon as possible. For any urgent matters, please contact my colleague."

Professional. Reassuring. Almost believable.

What if, just this once, we dropped the polite message and the half-truths? Here's what a nonprofit executive director might write if she allowed herself a slight excess of honesty.

Hello,

I am on vacation. You read that right. Vacation. And you know what? It's paid!

Yes indeed, a few cents of your donation may well be funding my salary while I'm not working.

Take a breath. Your donation also pays for the evenings, the weekends, the "quick" calls, the imaginary emergencies, and all the hours that show up nowhere on a timesheet.

If we did the real math, my hourly rate would probably reassure you. Or make you feel a bit ashamed.

What's more, I'm taking this vacation almost against my will. My board of directors forced me into it. They understood that a director who never stops sometimes ends up stopping for good.

A colleague of mine received an even more direct ultimatum from her partner: take a vacation, or face a breakup. That's the level of persuasion sometimes needed for a nonprofit director to dare to rest.

I could try not to read my email. But you made a donation. So, in your mind, a bit of my time belongs to you. Even the time I'm trying to reclaim for myself.

I could redirect you to someone else. She's exhausted too. Almost all of us are.

You asked us to cut our administrative costs. So we squeezed the lemon down to the very last drop. Now everything can fall apart the moment one person steps away.

But the ratio looks great. Exactly as you hoped.

When I get back, I'll have to catch up on emails, prepare for the annual general meeting, launch the holiday campaign, finish the grant applications, and put out whatever has started burning.

The positive effects of my vacation should be gone by noon.

I almost forgot. Thank you for your donation. It helps change lives. We'd just need to accept that the people doing this work deserve to have a life of their own too.

So, how do you feel after reading that message? A bit called out? A bit uncomfortable? Maybe even a little cheap?

Good. That discomfort brings us back to an obvious truth some people like to forget. Everyone needs a vacation.

Executive directors. Teams. Volunteers. The people who respond to emergencies, reassure families, find the money, deliver the services, and carry the mission well past the end of their workday.

Only the cause doesn't take a vacation. The needs don't close for the summer. Poverty doesn't set an out-of-office message. Illness, hunger, isolation and distress don't come back in September.

That's precisely why the people who deal with them need to be able to stop.

A cause needs money, of course. But it also needs oxygen. It needs passionate people, but above all, people able to think clearly. To listen attentively. To mobilize others. To manage crises without becoming an emergency themselves.

Passion doesn't replace sleep. Dedication doesn't repair burnout. And no mission, however noble, should depend on people who no longer dare to close their laptop.

Taking a vacation doesn't divert a donation away from the cause. It allows the people who serve that cause to come back with the energy needed to keep turning that donation into impact.

A responsible organization shouldn't just make sure its employees are entitled to vacation. It should make sure they can actually take it.

Without guilt. Without a phone on the table. Without having to check their email "just in case." Without coming back to a workload heavy enough to erase all the rest they banked, before lunchtime.

Of course, we need to keep funding programs, interventions and services. But we also need to fund the human conditions that make it possible to sustain them.

Adequate staffing. Decent salaries. Real succession planning. Well-treated managers.
Rested people.

Needs don't take a vacation. But the people who meet them need to be able to.

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