

# work at play

BY SHARON LIVETEN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBYN NEILD

It isn't easy for women to get away while keeping business in full swing. Here's how the best make it happen.

"Celebrities are notorious for getting married, splitting up, filing for divorce and having babies on holiday weekends," laughs Bonnie Fuller. "It's so thoughtless of them: Nick [Lachey] and Jessica [Simpson] filed for divorce on the eve of Thanksgiving. It totally ruined my weekend. And baby Shiloh [Jolie-Pitt] was born over Memorial Day." Fuller should know. She is editorial director of the magazine empire American Media Inc. and editor-in-chief of *Star*, the celebrity weekly. If that weren't challenging enough, in her limited spare time she wrote the new book about having it all: *The joys of Much, Too Much* (Fireside Books, April 2006).

Bonnie Fuller obviously runs on a tight schedule. But even with the propensity of Hollywood celebrities for scheduling their C-sections during major holidays, she manages to take at least a couple of vacations a year with her husband and four kids. It's not easy, but she makes it happen. "You organize," she says. "You have to hire people you totally believe in, then work with them so they can fully act when you're not there."

Fuller is an enthusiastic member of the new American workplace — the one that at least pays lip service to the fact that vacation time is good for workers and therefore good for business. Study after study proves that well-rested, fresh employees are more productive and far more efficient than those who never take time off.

But for many high-powered, driven execs, the most difficult part of vacations is actually letting go and leaving the building. Scott Eblin, president of the Eblin Group, an executive coaching firm, and author of *The Next Level: What Insiders Know About Executive Success* (Davis-Black, April 2006), believes that vacations can make the difference between a suc-

cessful career and a lackluster one. He insists that holidays are essential for decision-makers to retain clarity and innovation.

Sometimes the instinctive reaction is to work flat-out," Eblin says. "It's the wrong thing to do." He encourages employees to get away regularly. "When you [work nonstop], it's almost impossible to maintain perspective. We are human beings, not human doers. It's like running a car without ever getting an oil change. Eventually the engine locks up."

Intellectually, top businesspeople know this. More companies are even forcing employees to take holidays with use-it-or-lose-it vacation time. But that doesn't make the reality — actually walking out the door — any easier. Some, like Suzanne Sitherwood, senior vice president of Southern operations for AGL Resources and president of Chattanooga Gas, Atlanta Gas Light and Florida City Gas, lead by example.

"If I can't go away for a vacation, how can I say to my staff that they need to? Vacations make me better at work," Sitherwood says. "Getting away from the [mental] clutter helps me bring back an intelligent, clear vision at work."

So how does she leave the office without freaking out or working nonstop?

"I'm just not that important. My team is made of really high-caliber people. Also," Sitherwood adds, "my assistant is a saint." Sitherwood's assistant keeps track of her vacation itinerary and calls when needed, in the event of a major reorganization, the death of an employee or family member, or a serious operational matter. "Those events don't happen every day — thank goodness — so mostly, I don't hear from her."

As senior managing director and chair

# let go and get away! top all-time favorite vacatio



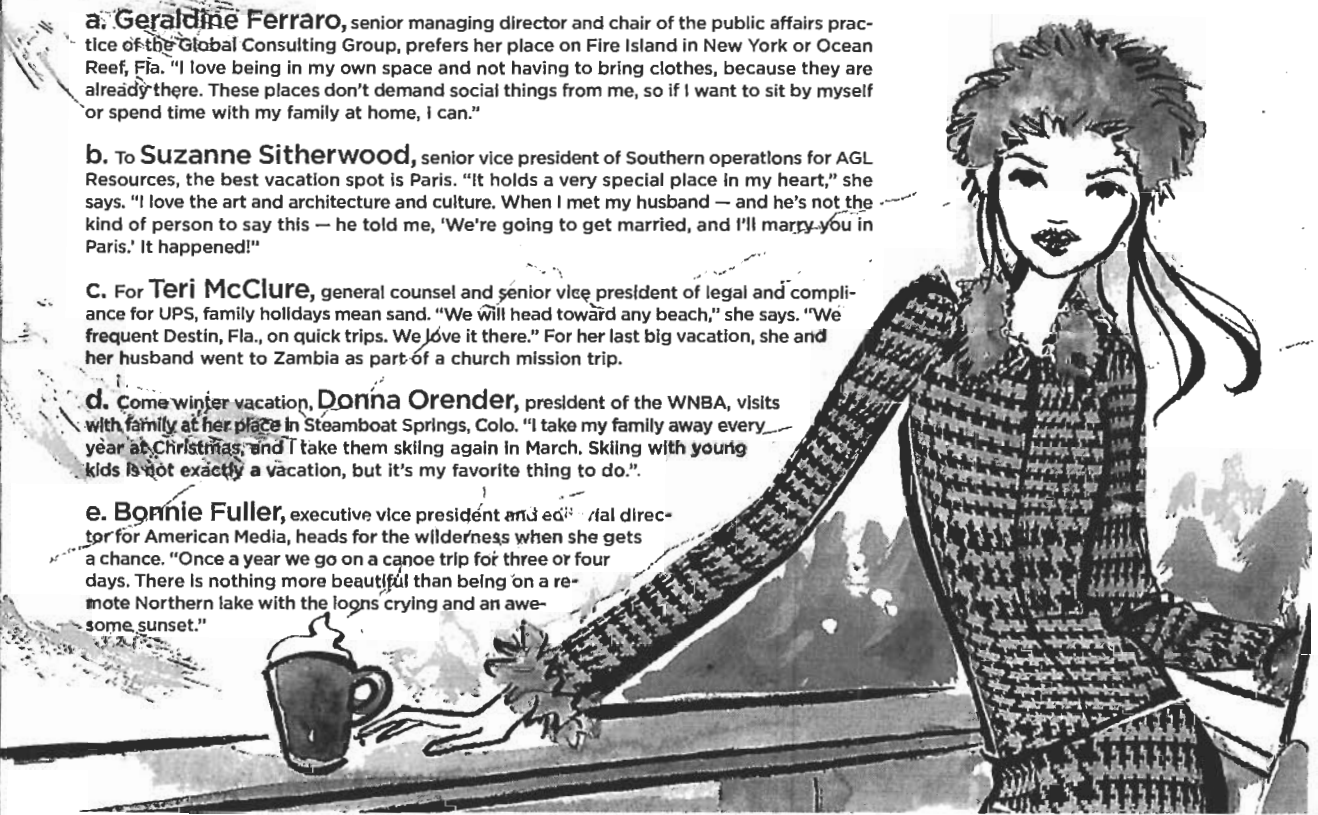
**a. Geraldine Ferraro**, senior managing director and chair of the public affairs practice of the Global Consulting Group, prefers her place on Fire Island in New York or Ocean Reef, Fla. "I love being in my own space and not having to bring clothes, because they are already there. These places don't demand social things from me, so if I want to sit by myself or spend time with my family at home, I can."

**b. To Suzanne Sitherwood**, senior vice president of Southern operations for AGL Resources, the best vacation spot is Paris. "It holds a very special place in my heart," she says. "I love the art and architecture and culture. When I met my husband — and he's not the kind of person to say this — he told me, 'We're going to get married, and I'll marry you in Paris.' It happened!"

**c. For Teri McClure**, general counsel and senior vice president of legal and compliance for UPS, family holidays mean sand. "We will head toward any beach," she says. "We frequent Destin, Fla., on quick trips. We love it there." For her last big vacation, she and her husband went to Zambia as part of a church mission trip.

**d. Come winter vacation, Donna Orender**, president of the WNBA, visits with family at her place in Steamboat Springs, Colo. "I take my family away every year at Christmas, and I take them skiing again in March. Skiing with young kids is not exactly a vacation, but it's my favorite thing to do."

**e. Bonnie Fuller**, executive vice president and editorial director for American Media, heads for the wilderness when she gets a chance. "Once a year we go on a canoe trip for three or four days. There is nothing more beautiful than being on a remote Northern lake with the loons crying and an awesome sunset."



of the public affairs practice of The Global Consulting Group, Geraldine Ferraro knows that the timing of her vacations is all-important. "If I have to be servicing a client down in D.C., when Congress is in session, that's not when I'm going to take a vacation," says the former three-term congresswoman and the first woman to run for vice president. "I'll take a vacation when Congress is out of session. And I have a very competent assistant who may send me an e-mail. She'll let me know what's going on and let me decide how to handle it."

It all seems so logical — really, vacationing isn't exactly rocket science. Sometimes it's even harder.

Teri McClure, general counsel for UPS and a member of its management committee, oversees 58 attorneys and 52 other staffers with all of the corresponding responsibility and crises.

Still, McClure says, "I don't think that I could do what I do day in and day out if I didn't have some break, some relief. Stepping away makes you feel re-energized."

For her last big vacation, McClure and her minister husband spent two weeks in rural Africa as part of a summertime church mission trip. McClure prepared for her journey like NASA readying to launch the space shuttle.

"I started planning as far back as January," says McClure, who signed up her mom to care for the kids. "Freeing up the calendar at work — that was the biggest challenge. Luckily for me, my vacation was taking place over a slightly slower time period in the corporate office, so I didn't miss any significant meetings." She adds that the winter holiday period is UPS' busiest time, so she never schedules vacation then.

She also is lucky enough to have plenty of support. "I actu-

## what they bring:

**Suzanne Sitherwood:**  
Comfortable shoes;  
ponytail holders;  
big sunglasses; at least  
one "feel good" garment

**Teri McClure:**  
Her own pillowcase and  
a sheet to wrap up in;  
really lightweight flannel  
drawstring pajamas

**Donna Orender:**  
Something good to read;  
her orange sneakers;  
a pair of baggy shorts to  
flop around the house in

**Bonnie Fuller:**  
Extra charging cords  
for her cell phone and  
BlackBerry; a good book;  
photos of her kids

ally have four deputies; they are coordinators who report to me. Each heads up a different practice area and is involved in the day-to-day activities of the department. But one of them will step in if something significant happens."

Ah, and that is the main issue. There's always the very real fear that something major will happen while you are away and you'll be left completely out of the loop. In addition to the possibly disastrous business consequences of being incommunicado, it just looks bad.

"Thank God for BlackBerrys," Ferraro says. "Or maybe not! I always take my BlackBerry with me, so I see all of the traffic of the e-mails in the office. So if there is an issue with a client, and it happens to be one of my clients, I get on the phone. This way, I can go for days without speaking to the office if there is nothing important going on."

But being connected also can mean that vacations turn into work. According to a recent Korn/Ferry International survey, 38 percent of the respondents felt they spent too much time connected to work through technology. Which begs the question: If you're always checking your e-mail or voice mail, are you really on vacation? Most women do work while on holiday, but they try to set reasonable limits — unless, of course, the technology doesn't work.

Some of the towns in Zambia where McClure traveled had limited or no cell coverage. "My e-mail was set up, and I have international cell phone coverage, but the cover can be sporadic," she says. "There is limited Internet access and ability at some of the hotels and government offices, but again that's limited. We just bought a local phone as a group and used that."

These women agree that if the team is on track, they can vacation in peace. Even Fuller — who never turns off her cell phone — knows this. She and her family go canoeing deep in the Western woods for three days.

"We are truly out of cell range for three or four days," she says. "There are no electronic connections. I'm always praying that no huge story breaks, and so far it hasn't. But mainly it's just really trusting my people. In my business it just has to keep rolling. There isn't a quiet time of year."

Vacations are a crucial part of achieving Life/Work balance, Eblin says. "Without them you can't perform at your best," he says. "[If you don't take holidays] you tend to over-rely on yourself and don't rely on your team. That's a lose-lose all around. It's about stepping back, getting some perspective."

McClure adds: "Even if it's something as basic as sitting on the beach and reading a book that doesn't have anything to do with the law, being on vacation helps me do what I do." ■



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