



## Escapee insists career women demand 'Time Off' for self

By John Strahinich

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So how stressed out was Mary Lou Quinlan running a high-powered New York ad agency a few years back?

She once dreamed she'd broken her leg in a car accident - only to wake up weeping to the reality she was fine, and therefore wouldn't be getting any time off from work.

Quinlan took a five-week leave from her chief executive gig, then left the agency entirely. Then she started her own consulting firm. And then, in her newly discovered spare time, she wrote a self-help book that just hit the bookstores.

Quinlan's message to hard-charging type-AAA "good girls" like herself is encapsulated in the book's title: "Time Off For Good Behavior: How Hardworking Women Can Take a Break and Change Their Lives."

"Women give and give and feel that only they can hold the whole world on their shoulder," Quinlan, 51, said last week. "They fill up their vacations and weekends with everyone else's to-do lists."

Coming from the town that invented the New York minute, Quinlan's story and message nevertheless resonated with several Boston women, albeit between hearty guffaws about the real fantasy of her tale: her five-week leave of absence from her old job.

"I understand on some level what she's saying," said Heather Conover, who's raising a 5-year-old daughter in South Dartmouth while running her own marketing firm in Southboro.

"There's just not enough time, period - for myself, for my daughter, for (my partner) Steve, for work, for friends. But I feel these are all choices I made."

Added Geri Denterlein, who's raising a 10-year-old son while running her own public relations shop: "Most women, I suspect, are like me. The idea of taking extended time off (from work) is just not an option. And when they're home, their children expect them to help them with their homework and cart them off to soccer practice."

But Julie Goodridge, an investment adviser in Jamaica Plain who's raising a 9-year-old daughter, said she can "totally relate" to Quinlan's broken-leg fantasy.

"All winter, I just wanted a really good cold where you lie down in bed with a fever and people take care of you," Goodridge said. "So what do I get? Migraines."

Quinlan says she's heard worse stories. ``One woman said she had elective gallbladder surgery so she could get time off," she said.

``One surgeon - she works in Boston - slipped in the OR and broke her elbow and now she's looking forward to eight weeks off."

Quinlan also comes armed with some startling numbers.

Item: Working couples with kids put in an average 91 hours a week at work, up from 81 hours in 1977.

Item: Employees hand back \$21 billion in unused vacation time each year.

Item: Seven out of 10 people earning at least \$40,000 fantasize about taking several months off, and one in five 35-to-40-year-olds fantasize about it every day.

``I'm obviously not recommending five weeks for everybody,"

Quinlan said. ``But how about just one weekend out of 52 - to be alone, to get some rest and to reflect on their lives?"

Conover does it differently, making sure she makes time for lunch or morning coffee with a friend, or for kayaking alone on a nearby river. ``It may not be a perfectly balanced life," Conover said, ``but it's a blended life."

Meanwhile, Goodridge says she's looking forward to five whole days alone during school break, when her spouse, Hillary, takes their daughter for a visit to her grandmother in Florida.

As for Quinlan - who now starts work at 10 a.m. and says she won't let her firm grow beyond four full-timers - she may be her own best advertisement for her gospel. After all, how many authors are fetching enough to serve as the cover model for their books?

``Forget plastic surgery," said the author and cover model for ``Time Off For Good Behavior."

``Take time off!