

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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## Relax. Have Fun. Get Inspired.

*How taking a vacation can help the bottom line*

By

Take a break. It'll be good for business.

Getting away from work can recharge your batteries. But it can also bring insights and inspiration. Many entrepreneurs say that they got the idea for a new venture while on vacation, or came up with a way to boost their existing business.

Here's a look at some of the insights entrepreneurs brought home as souvenirs.

### *Inspiring a Change*

For many aspiring entrepreneurs, a trip can be the catalyst for moving into a new business.

Inspiration struck David Warren seven years ago while climbing Mount Rainier with friends. At the time, Mr. Warren was stuck in a rut as a vice president at a security company. He wanted to own his own business but was pinned down by doubts.

While training for the climb and then making the ascent, he realized that starting a business wasn't so different. "Sometimes to see the joys of the summit, one has to overcome fears, be disciplined and endure a hard climb," he says.

Nine months later, he left his position and bought a company with an investor who climbed with him. He later sold his stake and is now president

and chief executive of BlueCloud Advisors LLC, a Cincinnati-based consulting firm specializing in cloud computing.



Jensen Family

The inspiration for a new company struck Robert Jensen (left) while he rode up a ski lift.

Robert Jensen of Montvale, N.J., also found inspiration on a mountain—a peak in Aspen, Colo. Two years ago, Mr. Jensen was looking to start a venture and "needed time to clear my head," he says. "Coincidentally, an annual ski trip with a number of my friends was coming up. I decided that I would put everything aside and go on this trip and just relax and enjoy."

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But his mind kept returning to an idea that had fizzled. Years ago, he had patented a pipe component that would make it cheaper and easier to install geothermal heat pumps—an eco-friendly technology that uses the temperature of the ground to heat and cool buildings. But the idea didn't go anywhere.

Then, while sitting on a chairlift in Aspen, "I noticed the cable that was transporting the line of chairs up the mountain," he says. "The steel cable consisted of a number of smaller cables wound around each other to look almost like a Twizzler candy."

He realized that same configuration could work for heat pumps, allowing more pipes to go into the ground and making the transfer of heat much easier. It made his old patent "seem cumbersome and inefficient by comparison," Mr. Jensen says.

Over the next few months, he wrote two new patent applications and incorporated a new business, Agreenability. Now, two years later, he says he has completed research and development and is getting ready to launch his product.

### *Permanent Vacation*



### *Robert Olin*

An off-road trip led Yanik Silver to launch an adventure-travel company.

In some cases, a vacation experience leads people

to start a business *about* vacations. Yanik Silver of Potomac, Md., was inspired by a four-day off-road racing trip in Baja California in 2005. It was incredible "flying around 70 to 80 mph through all sorts of terrain," he says. "But even more interesting were the people I met there. There were several CEOs of major companies that I connected with on a different level than just when I meet others at seminars and conferences."

So, he founded Maverick Business Adventures LLC, which lets people network while on high-risk adventure vacations, such as parachuting or diving with great white sharks.

### *A New Perspective*

In some cases, people get an insight into an *existing* business while traveling. For Bryan Ansley, the a-ha moment came when climbing Blood Mountain in Georgia in 2008. And it all had to do with water.



### *Ansley Family*

A long hike gave Bryan Ansley (center of group) an insight about business planning.

When Mr. Ansley first started distance hiking, he used water-purifying tablets that took four hours to work. That was fine as long as there were ample water supplies along the trail. But during one hike with his son, a drought had dried up the available water. We "had to shuffle zombie-like for six miles to the next water source," he says.

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So, Mr. Ansley bought a penlike product that purifies water in a minute using ultraviolet rays. He could concentrate on the hike and not worry about becoming dehydrated.

At the time, he didn't see any larger significance to that. Then, on Blood Mountain, realization struck. Mr. Ansley saw that he had financed his business, FNB Merchants, like he had managed his water supply.

"Just like I hadn't budgeted for a drought on the hiking trail, I hadn't budgeted for a recession in my business," says Mr. Ansley. On the trail, he needed "to invest in better tools to cope with small amounts of water. On the business side, I needed to allocate more funds to diversify the company away from a dependency on consumer spending."

Using that idea, he says, his Brentwood, Tenn., credit-card and identity-security-services firm has seen an average 23% annual growth rate in revenue.

### *Accidents as Opportunities*

It's not just *good* times that lead to inspiration—bad ones can also be a catalyst. That's what happened to Mike Michalowicz on a trip to Hawaii in 2005.



Adayla Michalowicz

The Michalowicz family hiking in Hawaii, where inspiration struck after a nasty accident.

"While I was touring one of the islands, my four-year-old son cut his leg on some rock," he says. The locals said it was obsidian, "one of the sharpest, most precise materials on Earth."

The nasty accident gave Mr. Michalowicz an idea. He had been struggling to find a name for his Fair Lawn, N.J., company, which closely analyzes how customers use websites so that clients can improve the sites' design. Obsidian Launch was born.

When he tells his son that the scar points to the day they found the name, "he basically yawns," Mr. Michalowicz says. "But he does distinctly recall the moment the obsidian sliced his leg."

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