

Holidays can be hard for entrepreneurs

by Brad Feld, Foundry Group • July 4, 2015 • 2 min read • [original](#)

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I'm feeling fine today. But I know many entrepreneurs who aren't. They are under intense pressure, worrying about an endless stream of things coming at them, suffering under the weight of [imposter syndrome](#) and other sources of anxiety. And, in some cases they are depressed, but trapped by our own culture which stigmatizes depression.

Earlier this week Biz Carson wrote an excellent article titled [There's a dark side to startups, and it haunts 30% of the world's most brilliant people](#). It started with Austen Heinz's suicide (Austen was the founder of Cambrian Genomics) and then built into a wide ranging discussion about depression among entrepreneurs.

It highlighted a recent study by Dr. Michael Freeman, a clinical professor at UCSF and an entrepreneur, which is the first to link higher rates of mental health issues to entrepreneurship.

Of the 242 entrepreneurs surveyed, 49% reported having a mental-health condition. Depression was the No. 1 reported condition among them and was present in 30% of all entrepreneurs, followed by ADHD (29%) and anxiety problems (27%). That's a much higher percentage than the US population at large, where only about 7% identify as depressed.

I've been very open about my struggles over the past 25 years with depression and anxiety and am quoted in the article. But after dinner last night, Amy discovered on Facebook that the son of a childhood friend of her's had committed suicide. It reminded me that depression and other mental health issues are widespread and are often extremely challenging around the holidays.

I used to struggle mightily with three day weekend and holiday weeks. While the rest of the world slowed down, I felt like the pressures on me were speeding up. I wanted everyone to get off their butts, stop relaxing, and respond to my emails. I was impatient and didn't want to wait until Monday to try to address whatever issues were in front of me. I felt disoriented, which just made me more anxious. And when I was in the midst of a depressive episode, time just strung out endlessly in front of me, in a very bad way.

I used to be especially cranky around Christmas time. I'm jewish and didn't grow up with Christmas, I always thought Hanukkah was a stupid holiday, made up to assuage sullen Jewish kids when all of their friends had gift orgies. I felt isolated and different, which just made my general anxiety and impatience around holidays even worse.

In the last decade this has eased. I now give myself up to the slower pace, I give myself space to feel however I want to feel, I rest a lot, and I hang out with Amy. I'm social, but not overly so, and avoid big gatherings which crush my soul. I read, spend time outside, and nap. I let my batteries recharge and I don't try to get caught up on everything, but instead just do what I feel like doing.

The July 4th weekend is always one that is joyful on the surface. It's summer. The weather is warm. People do outdoorsy things. Email slows to a trickle.

For an anxious, stressed, or depressed entrepreneur, this can be extremely uncomfortable and exacerbate whatever issues are going on.

If you are one of these entrepreneurs, try my approach this weekend. Just shut down all the stimuli. Get off your computer. Take a digital sabbath. Go outside. Lay on a couch with a book and fall asleep reading. Blow off the 4th of July party that you don't really want to go to and just stay home and watch TV in the middle of day. Let your energy go wherever it takes you. And recognize that all the emails, all the stress, all the anxiety, and all the people will be there on Monday ready to go again.

If you are the significant other of one of these entrepreneurs, take a lesson from Amy. Be patient. Be loving. Don't let it be all about your partner, but don't make it all about you. Just chill. And be together. Have a vacation – from everyone and everything else.

And for everyone else, recognize that holidays can be hard. And that's ok.

This story originally appeared on [Brad Feld](#).

