



How to Unplug From Work

RECLAIM YOUR NIGHTS, WEEKENDS, AND VACATIONS. THESE STRATEGIES CAN HELP YOU MANAGE THE GNARLY PROBLEM OF AFTER-HOURS JOB DUTIES. *by Daniel Bortz*

BET YOU CAN'T remember the last time you worked a 35-hour week. Thanks to technology, “employees feel the need to do more, work harder, and put in longer hours to stay competitive,” says Texas A&M management professor Wendy Boswell, who studies work/life balance. Smartphone users spend five hours on work email each weekend, reports the Center for Creative Leadership. A poll by the employment website Glassdoor found that 61% of people have worked during a vacation.

Productivity falls sharply after a 50-hour workweek, found Stanford economics professor John Pencavel. So connecting less is good for you *and* your company—though your boss may need convincing. To unplug without zapping your career, try this two-pronged plan:

REDUCE YOUR REGULAR HOURS

➔ **See where you stand.** Is work taking over nights and weekends? Before you speak up, figure out

whether you have cause to complain. Putting in extra hours might be a must for your field, level of seniority, or company culture. If not, it's okay to try to shift your manager's expectations.

➔ **Share your schedule.** Explain your obligations outside of work—you have to pick up kids from school, say, or you take a night class that keeps you off email. Knowing that, your boss will be more inclined to respect your personal time, says San Antonio productivity consultant Helene Segura.

➔ **Speak up.** If your boss keeps breaking the boundaries, address the issue head-on. But focus on her needs, not yours, says Segura. For instance, “I’ll do whatever it takes to reach our sales goals, but I’d like to talk about the amount of work coming in after hours.”

Make it clear that you’ll be available in a crisis. But agree on what constitutes an emergency and how you can be reached. Julie Morgenstern, author of *Time*

Management From the Inside Out, advises having your boss call instead of email so that you’re not at the mercy of your in-box.

GIVE YOURSELF A REAL BREAK

➔ **Put everyone on guard.** Time away from the office can help you recharge—so long as you plan in advance. That means reviewing what needs to be done before you go, making sure that happens, and reminding your boss and co-workers of your schedule.

➔ **Name your own sub.** Having a person cover for you will vastly reduce the number of emails you receive. Get that person onboard by promising to do the same.

➔ **Send the right message.** On your email auto-reply, state when you’ll be back and whom to contact until then. Don’t say you’ll “check email periodically,” says executive coach Libby Gill, or people might count on you to respond. Then put down the phone, pick up a piña colada, and toast your freedom. **M**