

Americans Fight to Unplug and Find Work-Life Balance

Chris Metinko | +Follow Aug 27, 2015 3:36 PM EDT

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NEW YORK (MainStreet) — Bill Fish freely admits there have been many times when his wife was trying to have a conversation with him and he was reading email.

"I will be the first to admit that I have gone through periods of inability to unplug," said Fish, 38, founder and president of online reputation protection site Reputation Online. "For the most part, technology is a wonderful thing, but in this instance, I believe it is hurting our quality of life."

Fish certainly is not alone. New research by CareerBuilder shows 24% of workers check work email during activities with family and friends, and 20% say work is the last thing they think about before they go to bed.

"When my grandfather finished his day at the office selling insurance, he walked out the door and didn't think about his job until the next morning," said Fish, a Cincinnati resident. "There was no laptop for work after the kids went to bed or an iPhone to constantly refresh at dinner. In all honesty, it had to be a much more healthy work-life balance."

Lisa Strohman, clinical psychologist and founder of the Technology Wellness Center — which examines the impact of technology on families — said the need for higher productivity along with the advent of things like unlimited data plans allowed individuals to be more connected for longer periods of time.

"Gone are the days were people are leaving work at five and not thinking about work until eight," Strohman said. "More and more people are working remotely which continues to push into personal time."

The survey bears that out, with 63% of workers saying they believe "working nine to five" is an outdated concept and half of workers saying they check or respond to work emails outside of work.



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"For many people, they are required by the employer to be available after hours, so they remain plugged in and check emails often," said Jonathan Alpert, a psychotherapist and executive coach in Manhattan. "For others it's more about feeling the need to [connect](#) with people."

Alpert said for many getting a text message or email from someone stimulates their brain, makes the recipient feel good, important or wanted, and then they are encouraged to check their devices again to achieve the same stimulation.

"This to some extent is intermittent positive reinforcement and it is powerful," Alpert said. "You never quite know when you might be getting message so you continue to check."

Despite what may be a powerful sensation, finding a balance between work and life is important, and the best way is taking control of your career and being proactive about setting time aside for time off, said Jim Link, chief human resource officer for Randstad North America.

"You don't have to be on a beach or a tropical island, but even if you have a 'staycation' at home, you need to schedule time away from the computer and

Along with setting time limits so that at a certain time each night you are unplugging from any outside sources, Strohman added creating a balance for yourself and family even could include tech free days — like "Tech Free Tuesdays."

Link said if you are on vacation and feel the stress of work creeping up, schedule "work" time for email and checking in, but set a timer and stick to it.

"If you find it almost impossible, shut off your phones and [tablets](#), so you are forced to disconnect," he said. "It is imperative to have time away from work to help get refreshed and energized."



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