

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Effectively Managing Technology so it Doesn't Run You

Gina owns a smart phone, a tablet, a PC and a laptop. Every night before going to bed and every morning when she wakes up she checks her email, voicemail, Face book and Twitter accounts. She makes herself available on evenings and weekends—whether at home, on the go or even while on vacation—and sometimes emails her boss at midnight just to show her commitment to the job. Instead of playing together with her daughter at the park, she sits on a bench, smartphone in hand, and catches up on emails while her daughter tackles the jungle gym alone. Despite all the extra time Gina puts in, her boss has questioned the quality of her work and says she often seems distracted. Gina feels overworked, underappreciated and stressed out!

For some, technology offers flexibility and the opportunity to work remotely. For others, an "office in your pocket" can make you feel like you're on call 24 hours a day. Where does work end and personal life begin? Feeling like you're permanently "on call" can cause anxiety, sleep problems, headaches and muscle tension: all of which can lead to chronic stress and the inability to "turn off" which can then result in more serious concerns. Being over-connected can create dangerous stress levels, making you less productive at work and less relaxed when you're finally at home. More noticeably, your constant connection to work via technology may actually start to disconnect you from those that are most important to you: your family and friends.

Time to Disconnect

In many ways, technology has made a lot of the work we do much easier. Need directions? Check out your GPS on your phone. Want to let your friend know you'll be late? Send them a quick text. Wondering when that world leader was in power? Check it out online. The down side to this increasingly "connected" world, however, is learning how to shut it off, especially when it comes to work. To escape your techno-cocoon at work and at home try to:

Aim for face time. Just because the technology is there, doesn't mean you have to use it. You can write 15 emails back and forth discussing something, but consider that it may be easily solved through a five-minute meeting or phone conversation. Technology doesn't always mean efficiency.

Single-task. Although multi-tasking is thought to be a critical skill, research has started to debunk this myth. A recent Stanford University study conducted multiple tests to compare the performance of "light" media multi-taskers with "heavyweights"—that is, people who juggled multiple media at the same time (e.g. emailing, while watching TV, listening to music and maybe throwing in a few phone calls for good measure). Their conclusion? Heavy media multi-taskers had problems sorting important information from distractions. It's no wonder then that having your email, corporate Twitter account, in-office messaging, etc. up and running all day can seriously affect your focus and productivity. Take your message notification off and instead set aside regular times throughout the day to check in on your email and other electronic commitments. This will give you the opportunity to devote 100 per cent to the task at hand—uninterrupted by technology.

Unplug. Identify certain times during the week like family dinners when your home has to remain "tech-free."During that hour each night no one (and that includes you!) can touch a computer, phone or device of any kind. Also, try to regularly schedule activities throughout the week that don't require technology at all. Plan dates with your spouse, join a sports league or just go for a walk.

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Set limits. Try your best not to bring work home with you, even if that means staying a little bit later in the evening. If that's not possible, set a cut-off time for remaining connected. Don't check your work email or voicemail after 7:00 p.m. and instead reserve that time for you and your family. If disconnecting during your off time isn't an option, set aside a *small* window of time to check in—and stick to it. Also, try to keep your personal phone and computer separate from the ones you use at work so the temptation isn't there.

Get away. If you work in an office, make an effort to step away from your desk, computer and phone during the day. Take a walk at lunch, eat away from your desk and commit to regular stretching. This will give you an opportunity to decompress so you're more motivated and productive when you return. It's also a good way to rest your eyes and body from the inevitable strain of technology.

Never forget that technology is supposed to be there to make your life a little easier, not to rule it. It should make your role at work more efficient, help you create and maintain meaningful relationships and not generate tension, stress and panic. Find ways to "unplug," refresh and take control and don't forget that nothing will ever replace quality "face time" with friends and family.