

Always 'on': How you can disconnect from work



THINKSTOCK

Experts say setting time limits, keeping home for family can be key ways to cope

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It's a few weeks into the new year, but those resolutions to spend more time with family, friends and the treadmill are likely being interrupted — even outright thwarted — by the daily work grind.

There are client crises to handle. Proposals that need last-minute updates. Requests to come into the office early, or on a day off. This is important stuff. Our paychecks depend on our performance.

Most of us know that continually logging excessive hours can be bad for our backs and brains, as well as strain relationships (especially when we type on our iPhones during family dinners). But it's just one more email to send. Oh wait, it's two, maybe three ... suddenly it's a half-hour later.

It's just so hard to break free when communication with bosses, co-workers and clients is a mere few feet away via that smartphone in a pocketbook, pants pocket or bedside table.

"Technology allows us to work anywhere, anytime," notes Carol Olsby, a human relations consultant and a member of the Society for Human Resource Management's global expertise panel, who says that even she at times is a workaholic.

"How do you turn it off when everything is coming to your phone? You're in the Safeway gro-

WORK AND PERSONAL TIME

American workers say they:

Have dreamt about work **60%**

Check email after leaving work **49%**

Work during non-business hours **46%**

Are up at night thinking about work **44%**

Gave up vacation days in 2015 **15%**

SOURCE CareerBuilder 2015 and 2016 surveys
GEORGE PETRAS, USA TODAY

cery line and you're answering emails. You are fully connected."

We're always on — checking emails before going to bed, once we wake up, en route to vacations and for some, during the middle-of-the-night bathroom run. Nearly half of all U.S. workers check email after they leave work and 45% say they do work during non-business hours, according to a 2016 CareerBuilder survey.

Technical advances provide employees with greater flexibility, yet there's also the expectation

that with increased access, workers will be more available, says Patrick Kulesa, director of employee research at human resources consulting firm Willis Towers Watson.

That constantly-connected expectation comes at a time when work demands are already high.

"There is pressure globally — it's not constrained by borders — certainly for multinational organizations to deliver more with less and to be more productive," Kulesa says.

It's so difficult to escape the information onslaught that some countries have taken action to help employees maintain some sort of work-life balance.

France instituted a law Jan. 1 that requires firms with more than 50 employees to give its workers the right to disconnect during their off hours. The Japanese government, along with participating business groups, will launch a campaign in February that encourages workers to leave work at 3 p.m. on the last Friday of each month, reports Bloomberg. The "Premium Friday" campaign comes after high-profile reports of "karoshi" — the Japanese term for death by overwork — including the suicide of a young woman who was working 100 hours or more of overtime in a single month.

Yet, most countries — and

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Towers Watson

most companies, for that matter — aren't putting in measures to reduce our workloads. It's on us as individuals to figure this out.

One way to survive, and even thrive, is to proactively manage the expectations of others, says psychologist Mary Alvord.

That means communicating clearly about our availability and coming up with strategies such as asking a colleague to cover our duties while we are on vacation. Such planning ahead can help to reduce stress. "Part of anxiety is feeling out of control," Alvord says.

Also, keep in mind that there are some positives to our constantly connected world.

"Some people are overwhelmed, but a lot of people like the flexibility of it," says Lee Rainie, director of Internet, science and technology research at the Pew Research Center.

For instance, if employees can do work at night, that can give them the ability to tackle some personal things during the work day.

"The work-home boundary is a lot more fluid than it used to be," he says. "People are doing home things at work and work things at home. More than less are glad for it."

Contributing: Kirk Spitzer and Maya Vidon

THE WEEK AHEAD



JUSTIN LANE, EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

Indicators out this week offer baseline for Trump

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Smokestacks, job creation and changes in consumer prices will be top of mind for investors this week — especially as a new presidential administration is set to take office.

Key economic indicators regarding industrial production, employment and inflation will be released starting Tuesday.

These measures in many ways will be the starting-point benchmarks for President-elect Donald Trump as investors gauge the success of Trumponomics years down the road.

Some of the indicators investors will be watching, include:

► **The Empire State Survey.** This is the first economic indicator, due out **Tuesday**. The index measures the business outlook of manufacturers in New York state and is used as a general forecast of business activity. The measure posted a big jump in December indicating business confidence.

But investors should mute expectations for this week's reading, according to economists at brokerage firm Nomura, suggesting "hard data on real economic activity were mixed."

► **Industrial production.** Evidence that manufacturing output improved in December is

Traders work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange at the opening bell.

piling up, and a **Wednesday** reading on industrial production will offer proof. Oil production ticked higher during December along with vehicle and parts production. Boosting U.S. manufacturing has been a major focus of the incoming president. Nomura estimates the December reading on industrial production will show a 0.6% increase.

► **Consumer Price Index.** Inflation is expected to be a tepid 0.3% in the upcoming reading due **Wednesday**, but there could be much more volatility beyond the headline number. Price changes in food are seen as modest, but higher inflation is expected in energy prices. Inflation trends will affect how the Federal Reserve adjusts monetary policy and interest rates.

► **Initial jobless claims.** Trump has been aggressively applauding companies that say they will add U.S. jobs. **Thursday**, investors will see where the economy was in terms of joblessness at the end of President Obama's term. Recent jobless claims data show that the market for workers is healthy and layoffs have been "subdued," Nomura says. Nomura economists warn investors from reading too much into the December number since holiday statistics can be distorted.

Investors, though, this week will have a yardstick with which to measure the success of Donald Trump as president.

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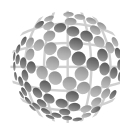
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