

Remote Ready



Strategies for Work-Life Balance



Work-life bleed can be defined as the spillovers in attention and focus resulting from a porous work-life boundary. It is the most-cited factor for preferring a traditional office job over a remote position.

Given your understanding of work-life balance issues, what unique manifestations may it hold for you? Do you struggle separating your work from the rest of your life? **Remote work is not the best option for everyone.** But if you are interested, the below strategies will help establish a more concrete barrier between your personal life and work obligations.



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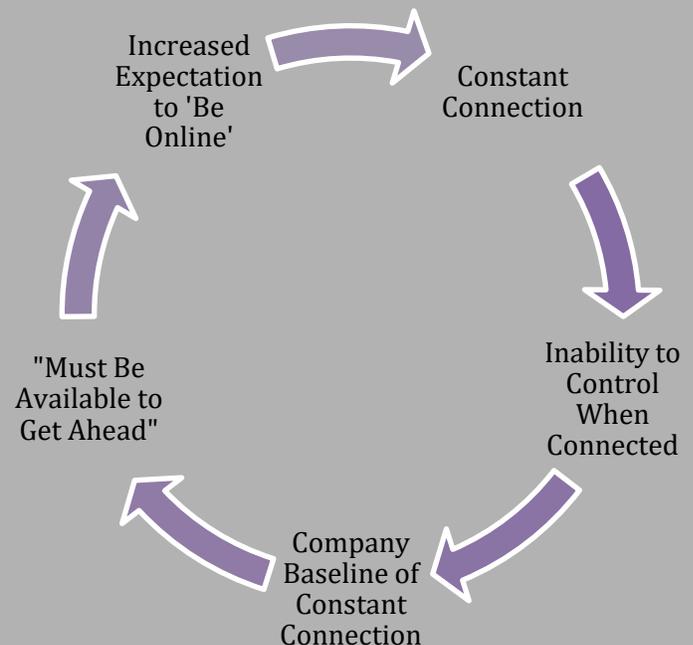
Shutting Down

1. Shutting Down

In recent years, Human Resource professionals and management gurus alike have come to stress the importance of work-life balance. With the gradual realization that professional productivity and personal well-being are inextricably linked, companies have begun to think about how to encourage well-being on both fronts.

Preaching a fitting work-life balance is one thing; practicing it is another. Remote work adds a special twist to this challenge. Work-life balance is the most frequently cited difficulty of a telework position.

In *Indistractable*, Nir Eyal details a *cycle of responsiveness* characteristic of many modern-day desk jobs.¹ For Eyal, it begins with connection: portable laptops and cellphones that enable work at almost any time and in almost any place. The cycle plays out on the right (adapted and modified from *Indistractable* by Nir Eyal²).



¹ Nir Eyal. *Indistractable*. 2019. p168.

² Ibid, p169.

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Shutting Down (continued)

How then to relax when your work follows you around? Avoid the creeping pressure to be *plugged in* or the nagging feeling of potentially missing out. The goal is *guilt-free relaxation*.

Easier said than done! There are no sure-fire answers, but a few tricks may help you along the way:

- **Talk yourself through it.** Cal Newport suggests literally talking to yourself. When you close your laptop for the day, say the words *shutdown complete*.³ Resist the notion that you may look foolish and shout it a couple of times. Give yourself permission to officially clock out. Take this well-deserved time for yourself and/or your family and friends.
- **Inspire confidence in your end product.** Cultivate strategies that maintain a healthy dose of confidence. Certainty in the value of your work may mitigate nagging feelings of inferiority or the 24/7 desire to *get ahead*. What do you bring to the table? Understand and remind yourself of the unique combination of intelligence, talents, and work ethic you bring to your job each day. Maintaining confidence may help you prevent the lingering self-doubts engendered by Eyal's cycle of responsiveness.
- **Plan for the next day.** Take time to chart the course for tomorrow. By doing so, you will mentally disassociate with outstanding tasks today. Smother attention residue: the focus you leave with one task by switching (both mentally and physically) to another.⁴ What tasks are in your mental queue right now? Reduce this internal clutter by preemptively allotting time for them in the day ahead.

³ Cal Newport. "Drastically Reduce Stress with a Work Shutdown Ritual." 2009. <https://www.calnewport.com/blog/2009/06/08/drastically-reduce-stress-with-a-work-shutdown-ritual/>.

⁴ Matthew Vere. "How Attention Residue is Slowing You Down." 2018. <https://medium.com/@beatsbyvanity/how-attention-residue-is-slowing-you-down-86aea3f2ad99>.

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Re-Imagining Community

2. Re-Imagining Community

Reconnecting in new (and safe) ways with your community is a strong positive of a remote work position. This community includes your neighbors, more distant friends and family, and others in need during these troubled times. Even your natural surroundings can be conceptualized as a type of community.

- **Neighbors.** First, consider the definition of social capital. Social capital consists of the “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.”⁵ The dramatic decline of bowling leagues in the late 20th century, was one prominent example of its continued decline.⁶ Remote work offers the opportunity to return to the local connections and trust once so common in society through (safe) social contact, self-organization, and voluntary services. One progressive example comes from Great Britain, where thousands of local volunteer groups have sprung up overnight during the Coronavirus crisis to deliver food and medicinal supplies to the U.K.’s most vulnerable populations.⁷
- **The environment.** Our natural world is shockingly pliable. In the present *Anthropocene* period, human beings now account for the largest changes in planetary ecology.⁸ Consider this double-edged sword: a wildlife *refuge* created in Chernobyl after thousands of residents evacuated a nuclear

⁵ Robert Putnam. *Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital*. 2000. p66.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Coronavirus: Volunteers flock to join community support groups.” BBC. 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-51978388>.

⁸ Multiple authors. *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*. 2014. p1.

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Re-Imagining Community (continued)

disaster in 1986.⁹ While the Earth may suffer greatly under our care, it rebounds quickly in rare moments of stewardship. Consider how a remote job proximate to the environment around you may help you revitalize your own natural surroundings.

- **Your extended community.** While remote works encourages renewed contact with our immediate communities, it also affords time to connect with the world writ large. Give extended family and old friends a call. Visit others you care about, or even ‘visit’ through free video calling services. While reserving significant considerations for the unparalleled nature of face-to-face interaction, rapid advances in telecommunications technologies suggest in their own way, that we have never been so connected.

⁹ “Chernobyl: the wildlife haven created when people left.” The Guardian. 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2019/may/28/chernobyl-wildlife-haven-tour-belarus-created-nuclear-disaster-zone>.

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The Hedonistic Treadmill

3. The Hedonistic Treadmill

Hedonistic adaptation can be defined as “adaptation to stimuli that are affectively relevant.”¹⁰ In other words, human beings consistently adjust to external changes, even drastic ones, over time.

A section on work and life balance would be short-sighted without mention of hedonistic adaptation. Hedonistic adaptation is a pernicious feature of everyday living, one that virtually everyone has unconsciously experienced.

A blossoming field in both psychology and economics, hedonistic adaptation states that humans will gravitate toward a regular baseline state. Psychologists tend to focus on happiness. While extreme events on the positive (e.g. winning the lottery) and negative (e.g. loss of a family member) sides of the spectrum will produce severe changes in short-term well-being, the affected individual will slowly but surely return to his or her average level of stimulus.¹¹

The hedonistic treadmill will return us to our baseline state of happiness with almost uncanny certainty. Yet despite its fatalistic implications, the idea can provide solace in difficult times. While change is inherently disruptive, recognize that we are wired to eventually return to baseline states of normalcy and routine. Individuals and societies have rebounded from great tragedy throughout history. While this treadmill does not excuse complacency or the rightness/wrongness of actions, it may allow you greater peace of mind in adopting some new, post-Coronavirus normal. In the words of Fyodor Dostoevsky: “Man is a pliant animal, a being who gets accustomed to anything.”

¹⁰ Norbert Schwarz. Well-Being: Foundations of Hedonic Psychology.” 1999.

<https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=-wIXAwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA302&dq=%22hedonic+adaptation%22&ots=ZpxXk2ehf1&sig=AEbH2Y6MQoviWV57SCK2rMFPjoA#v=onepage&q=%22hedonic%20adaptation%22&f=false>.

¹¹ Ibid.