WORK-LIFE BALANCE

How to Transition Between Work Time and Personal Time

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Physical presence doesn't always equate to mental presence. You could be sitting at your desk but more preoccupied about a home repair than the assignment at hand, or you could be at the kitchen table thinking more about the proposal you have to finish than the people eating dinner with you. That's why transitions from work mode to personal mode are so

essential. And you have to make an especially intentional effort on these transitions when you work from home because you don't have the natural change of context cues.

In my experience as a time management coach, here are some of the ways to be less distracted and more present whether you're working or enjoying personal time.

Have a starting work routine

Mr. Rogers knew how to do transitions right. Many generations of children knew that when he was singing his iconic "It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood," changing his sweater, and then putting on different shoes that it was the start of their time together.

You don't need to sing when you start work (unless you really want to), and you don't need to switch sweaters. But you can have certain things that you do in the same way each morning — even if you work from home. Maybe it's putting your dishes in the dishwasher, turning off the lights that may be on around the house, getting a cup of coffee, and then sitting down at your computer. Or maybe it's doing a quick workout, showering, and then turning to your phone to check email. Whatever works for you, try to do those activities in the same way each day. The point behind this is to prime your brain that this is now "work" time.

Make a plan

To increase your productivity and clarity both for work and life outside of work, have a plan for the day. That includes knowing the time of your meetings, deciding what projects you will work on, and being clear on when you will do tasks like answering email. You'll also want to have some plan for your evenings in terms of what you would like to get done or simply do to relax. Knowing that everything has a "place," such as a time during your work day when you will work on a presentation or a time in the evening when you can research activities for your kids, helps you to not feel like you *have* to do work during personal time or vice versa.

The most common times people make these daily plans are in the morning at the start of work, as they wrap up their work days, or in the evening before bed. Choose the time that's

best for you, and then put a recurring reminder in your calendar to prompt you to build the habit.

Prioritize your communication

It's understandable that you may need to have some personal communication during work hours and some professional communication after hours. But prioritize your communication based on context. During the hours when you want to focus on the job, try to reduce your personal communication. For example, you could group together answering nonurgent personal texts to a few times during your work day and, in general, avoid long stretches on social media. After those hours, do the opposite. Stay away from work email and only answer work calls and texts in the evening if they are absolutely necessary.

This will not only keep your time invested in the right places but also keep you mentally present in both your professional life and personal life.

Set a wrap-up routine

To make sure you can be fully off-the-clock later in the evening, have a wrap-up routine that you start at least 30 minutes before you need to end work. This could include doing a final check to make sure that all critical emails have a response, looking over your task list to know that you have completed what's essential, and if you do realize that you will need to work later at night, decide on exactly what you will complete and when. For example, you might determine, "I will review this proposal for an hour or less starting at 8 PM." The reason it's good to have that specificity is then you won't have a cloud over your head all evening that you should probably do some work without a clear sense of exactly what you will do and when. You can mentally disconnect until 8 PM and then also feel free to completely stop at 9 PM. when the objective and the time frame are clear.

Focus takes intentional effort and can feel difficult at times, especially in the midst of massive uncertainty. But by following these tips, it is possible to be present most of the time when you're working or in your personal time.