

# YOUR WORKPLACE

*Inspired People. Outstanding Results.*

## STEPS TO INCREASED PERFORMANCE

UNLIMITED VACATION –  
COULD IT WORK AT  
YOUR WORKPLACE?

REASONS YOUR TEAM  
WON'T TAKE RISKS

FOCUS ON CORE  
COMPETENCIES  
FOR SUCCESS



12 Tips to Survive  
the Holiday  
Season



# HOW SMART ARE smartphones?

Unplug your way to enhanced productivity

» BY CRAIG DOWDEN, PHD

**O**ur workplaces are becoming leaner as we attempt to manage the challenges of an increasingly competitive environment while also trying to maximize productivity. Globalization and the introduction of new products and service markets continue to test our capacity to deliver on our most important objectives.

The impact of social media also raises some important obstacles in terms of our productivity. Our ability to remain connected 24 hours a day, seven days a week has intensified the pressure to continue to work long after we have left the office. It is now quite commonplace for people to take work home with them on weeknights and weekends. A recent survey by U.S. Travel Association and GfK, a market research firm, has confirmed that many employees do not take any time off from work, with some wearing it as a badge of honour.

Over and above the impacts on our psychological and physical health, an important question that is lost in all of this "activity" is whether or not these advancements facilitate our productivity. Leslie Perlow, author of *Sleeping with your Smartphone*, conducted a four-year study with Boston Consulting Group (BCG) to find an answer.



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Not surprisingly, when she asked consultants about their typical work week, over 90% said they worked over 50 hours, with almost half stating they averaged over 65 hours. This does not include the additional 20 to 25 hours each consultant spent checking their smartphones outside of work hours.

Her eventual global initiative started out as a pilot project with one small BCG team. With this group, she mandated Predictable Time Off (PTO), which meant that one night each week, a consultant would unplug at 5pm and not check emails or voicemails until returning to the office the next day. Essentially, the team would cover for the person who was enjoying PTO.

Not surprisingly, this created a lot of concern and pushback from the consultants initially. Life at BCG was all about being on. However, a simultaneous requirement she introduced was that the team needed to talk about how they were going to make the PTO a reality. This commitment, along with the necessary discussion around what it would take to make this change happen, yielded tremendous results.

First, the consultants successfully streamlined their work, which allowed them to accomplish more in the same period of time. Essentially, the knowledge that they would be taking time off improved their level of focus. Another noted benefit was that the communication between the consultants improved. Some clients were pleasantly surprised when they were informed about the change and even reported better customer service as a result. Other clients went so far as to voice appreciation that BCG was undertaking such an initiative.

Although her initial experiment involved a small team, her results were so profound that a global initiative was launched, eventually touching more than 900 BCG global offices involving 30 countries and spanning five continents.

## POWERING DOWN TO POWER UP

Clearly, the above research demonstrates the impact of powering down our electronic devices in order to power up our productivity. Although it may seem difficult to start the process, there are some simple things you can do to accomplish this:

### 1 Communicate

If you are part of a team, talk openly about your concerns of unplugging with the group. Have an open and honest conversation about the workload you carry outside of the office, with an eye towards identifying what activities/issues get the most attention. Once you have a strong idea of the reality

of the challenges facing the team, ask each team member to power down for the same amount of time, while rotating your availability. In this way, everyone gets to benefit from stepping away from the office, while also being comfortable knowing that someone has your back.

### 2 Power down

Interestingly, very few people know what it is like to power down their smartphones. In fact, a recent study by Timothy Wilson of the University of Virginia showed that people would rather administer painful electric shocks than sit alone with their thoughts for 15 minutes. Find some time to turn off your smartphone and see how it feels. Do not panic. It will still be there when you turn it back on. Understanding your relationship with your smartphone and controlling it, rather than the other way around, is an important aspect of protecting your well-being.

### 3 Leave it behind

When on vacation, at best, leave your smartphone behind. Research has shown that taking your smartphones on vacation essentially keeps you connected and lessens the positive benefits of your time away. Some hotels have installed lockboxes to safely hold the cell phones of their guests. If you feel uncomfortable doing this (or your hotel does not provide such a service), lock your phone in your room safe. At least this way when you go to retrieve it, it will be an intentional decision rather than an automatic one.

### 4 Set small goals

Identify a reasonable goal for yourself during the week. Perhaps it is to turn off your phone while having dinner, or while you sleep, or even for one hour each night. Whatever it is, track your progress, both in terms of how you feel as well as your own productivity. And don't forget to celebrate your successes, even the small wins.

Although smartphones provide you with the opportunity to stay connected to the people around you and bring countless benefits, there are costs associated with their use. Research has demonstrated that in this age of connectivity, our psychological and physical well-being is often compromised by our constant state of engagement with work. Reflecting on the research above should give you pause to think about how you organize yourself and your work. You may be surprised to learn that unplugging from your phones may be the ultimate application needed to maximize your performance, potential and productivity. 

*Craig Dowden Ph.D., focuses on bridging the gap between what science knows and what business does. His firm specializes in the custom design and delivery of evidence-based leadership development programs and services. His main areas of practice include executive and career coaching, workshop facilitation/keynote speaking, employee engagement, and psychometric/personality assessment including 360-feedback.*