



Preserving Your Life Outside of Work

by Fellows Rena Andoh, Lewis Goss, and Jaya White

How do you set boundaries at work to preserve your non-work life?

Rena Andoh: The most important aspect of managing boundaries is to know what is actually non-negotiable. Once you establish your non-negotiables in your own mind, and you feel that your boundaries are defensible (and by that, I mean that your unavailability is not excessive and takes into account critical and non-negotiable deadlines), it just becomes a question of maintaining them.

Lewis Goss: The key to time away or time unplugged is to make sure your responsibilities and obligations are accounted for during your absence. If there is a particular activity, family time, or other “no-work” period (whether one-time or recurring) that is important for you to protect, it is critical to communicate your availability clearly and in advance, plan for covering your responsibilities, and have contingency in case of emergency.

Jaya White: I have two young children and a husband with a busy career as well. What has worked for us is for me to have a flex-time work arrangement for the time being. I work a reduced schedule and block out certain days and times on my calendar that I am busy with family-oriented activities. I choose my commitments wisely. Every time I am asked to do something, I think through whether it is important to me, or valuable to my career, my firm, or my professional relationship before I say yes. Note that I have always found LCLD events to be well worth my time!

How do you overcome any discomfort that may arise from asking for time off for personal reasons or navigating a flexible schedule?

RA: No one should be passing judgment on you that, for example, your non-negotiable vet appointment is less valuable than their non-negotiable kid’s soccer game. As long as your productivity and profitability remain high, you should have some leeway (while being respectful of others’ needs) to manage your outside affairs. When protecting your boundaries, be affable, be firm, and don’t sound defensive or attack others. Just state your available dates, and remain calm and reasonable.

JW: My general advice would be to make sure that your work is nothing less than excellent and that you are meeting (if not exceeding) all of the requirements for your position. It’s an easier case for somebody to allow you more flexibility or time off if you are performing excellent work.

I am fortunate that I have worked with the same people, who know me and my family, for many years. Quarles & Brady also supports flexibility, and the national chair of my practice group has worked a reduced schedule, so it's nice to see other people being successful while navigating a similar path.

LG: Prove that your absence won't have an adverse impact on your team and won't be an uncomfortable endeavor because your colleagues won't view it as an inconvenience. If you are working to establish a track record for consistent performance regardless of your schedule, provide as much detail about your plan to cover your work as necessary to give your colleagues comfort that your absence won't cause any problems.

Do you have any time-saving tips or tools that make it easier to juggle personal and professional lives?

JW: A great calendar! I use mine for everything in my life, including family and weekend events, and I block out times to limit the number of additional meetings and calls that can be added to my schedule.

LG: Efficiency is key, but that can be achieved in so many different ways; you have to find what works best for you. I find that getting to work early and working in a quiet environment for a couple of hours before the business world gets going provides me time at the end of the day to get away earlier than I otherwise would to see my family.

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