

BloombergBusinessweek



Reminder: You Don't Need to Work on Vacation

By Claire Suddath on August 31, 2012

By this time next week, I will be somewhere between Monterey, Calif., and Yosemite National Park, where, if all goes according to plan, I will be enjoying a glorious, relaxing drive followed by a cozy night by a campfire that will include lots of s'mores and zero bear attacks. I will not be checking my work e-mail.

That doesn't mean I won't check it at all --Yosemite and Monterey are just two stops on a long cross-country road trip I'm taking with my boyfriend, and while they're definitely too beautiful to warrant a curious scroll through work e-mails, earlier that week we'll be driving across the entire state of Kansas and, well, work e-mails are way more interesting than Kansas.

That's the secret to detaching from work while on vacation, says work-life balance expert Jeff Davidson, author of *Breathing Space*, knowing when to check in and when to tune out. "Years ago I'd recommend turning your work phone or e-mail off completely," Davidson says, "but now we're all so connected, so wired into what's happening, that many of us have lost the ability to disconnect completely." It is still possible to detach; Davidson says he spent much of June in northern Norway -- where the World Wide Web isn't all that wide -- and he found, to his relief and delight, that he had no problem stepping away from his e-mail while he was there. But not everyone is like him, he says, and so the best rule is to communicate with your office for only two reasons: if you absolutely have to, or if the guilt and anxiety you'd feel over staying away detracts from having a good vacation.

“I feel like I’d be less of a person, a bad employee, if I didn’t work on vacation,” says Jermaine Turner, director of current series for Walt Disney Pictures Animation. Turner talked to me earlier this month, right before he left for his honeymoon to Aruba. He told me that he gets six weeks of paid vacation from Disney and that his bosses encourage him to take it. But he finds that when he does, he just works remotely anyway. “I read scripts, watch [television] episodes and take notes on them, I do something every day of vacation,” he says. Once, he conducted an hourlong conference call while on his way to go zip-lining in Mexico with his girlfriend (now his wife). “Then when we got to the zip line, I was on the phone for another 20 minutes.” His wife was not pleased.

Davidson says she had good reason to be upset. A call like that alters your vacation day and it affects the people around you, he says. “If it’s early in the morning before your family is up, then that’s one thing -- that’s your personal time you’re using for work. But in the middle of the day, you’re changing your vacation by fielding these calls.” Unless you’re the business owner or CEO and you absolutely have to be reachable, there’s really no reason to be working that hard.