

Work / Life Balance: 9 Work Habits to Get You Home On Time

For entrepreneurs, it may be hard to call it a day. However, balance is key.



When you're an entrepreneur it's next to impossible to call it a day: the business of running a business has a never-ending to-do list. But without a healthy balance between a robust professional life and a legitimate personal life, your work can become uninspired and your life uninteresting. Stepping away every day with enough time to do things other than work helps you clear your head, gain perspective and bring your best to all areas of your life.

The first step to reclaiming your life is accepting that your work will never be "done." It's not healthy for your workday to end when you simply don't have the energy to do any more. Then employ these nine strategies to get you out of the office—and out enjoying life—at a reasonable hour every day.

1. Commit to a Departure Time Every Day

There's something very powerful about defined time frames. If you know you've got a drop-dead deadline to get out of Dodge at 5pm, you'll work smarter and harder all day to make that happen. Parents of young children in pricey daycares know the drill—many of them charge \$5 for every minute past they're late past closing! If you don't have an expensive reason to leave at the prescribed time, but your after-work time is important to you, help

solidify the habit by making appointments or meeting friends immediately after work. Priorities come into sharp relief when you're racing against the clock and you'll skip that leisurely coffee, idle chit chat or social media check-up if it means shutting down on time.

2. Don't Insist on the Last (Email) Word

Ever had that email conversation that just wouldn't end? The thread in which the last three emails were comprised of responses like, "Thanks," "Okay," and "Will do"? Forget the niceties (there's nothing nice about contributing to yet another unread email after hours) and, at the end of the day, let the conversation go. If you can, avoid sending emails in the evening. It'll not only keep you in the professional head space, you're doing it to others. If you simply can't resist getting through a few emails before bed to lighten your load for the next day, tee them up and hit send in the morning.

3. Stop "Working" an Hour Before You Stop Working

Forget about taking a deep dive into a complicated project or booking a meeting an hour before you're set to leave. Chances are, you'll lose track of time or other people will derail your plans to take off on time. Instead, commit to making the last hour of your workday all about setting yourself up for success the next day. That might mean closing documents on your computer, answering those final emails for the day, tidying your desk and listing your priorities for the next day, so you're ready to swing back into action the minute you get in the next morning.

4. Protect Your Time & Preserve Your Work / Life Balance

Don't let your overcrowded calendar fool you into thinking you're uber-productive. If your days are packed from start to finish, the opposite is probably happening. And for good reason! If you're an ambitious entrepreneur, you want to be saying yes more than no and jamming your days full of ways to move the business forward. But you may be neglecting your basic human needs.

Top leaders often give themselves "margins" between meetings to do important things like take a bio break, nourish themselves, clear their heads, take a brief walk and, you know, work on projects instead of planning non-stop. If you're the victim of non-stop meetings and commitments, start by protecting an hour or two a day and work your way up from there. You may eventually institute things like, "no-meetings Mondays" so you can clear out some of your to-do items without interruption every week.

5. Leave Errands and Personal "Work" for After Hours

One of the greatest perks of being your own boss is having the flexibility to manage your own time. Need to pop out and pick up ingredients for dinner? Get your hair cut? Craft that evite for the upcoming birthday party? Check up on Facebook? While it's a huge benefit to get these things done during the workday, the down side is that they can eat into your day more than you think. A quick errand or appointment outside the office will always take longer than you intend for it to and personal phone calls and social media take on a life of their own. If you want to leave on time every day—and avoid working all evening and on weekends—keep the workday items focused on work.

6. Plan Ahead

A highly-effective habit of proven leaders is to build a roadmap of priorities every week—and regularly keep an eye on it to ensure they're on task. Set aside some time every Friday afternoon to assess what you need to accomplish the following week, prioritizing time-sensitive tasks as you go. You might assign certain tasks to certain days, including scheduled meetings. When you start the work week with a vision of what your week looks like and what you want to achieve, it's much easier to make that happen. Most importantly, be realistic. You're not going to start and finish an updated business plan in a day. For big projects, break it down into smaller, easily attainable pieces so you're always moving things forward, bits at a time.

7. Read Emails in Blocks, Not in Real Time

Do you have the willpower to turn off your email? If you do, you'll almost assuredly be a more productive person. Setting aside time to read and respond to your email two or three times a day will ensure you're doing more than just "triaging" your day, i.e. responding to emails as they come in rather than working on any of your big priorities. An added bonus is that people will notice that you're not lightning-fast with your responses and won't email you with simple questions or problems they are capable of solving themselves.

8. Set Aside Time for Recurring Tasks

Though the life of an entrepreneur is typically hectic and unpredictable, there are certain tasks we all have to take care of regularly. One way to make sure you stay on top of them is to schedule the same time every week (or month) to do them. Maybe Monday is prospecting day, Tuesday is the day you take care of accounting and payroll, Wednesday you leave open for meetings. By dedicating a portion of a day every week to the same task, you'll reflexively get into that mode at the appointed time, ensuring you'll be more productive with the time you set aside.

9. If it Takes Less than 2 Minutes, Just Do It

How many times do we "make a note" (mental or otherwise) to email someone, set up a meeting or look something up? A great way to reduce small tasks is to put into motion the rule, "If it takes less than two minutes to do, just do it." Don't make a plan for it, don't add it to your list, just take care of it. By just doing it, you'll feel incredibly productive and highly motivated to get stuff done!



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Heather Hudson has been a freelance writer for more than 17 years. As a small business owner, she understands the triumphs and challenges of life as an entrepreneur. And as a longtime FreshBooks customer, she's always looking for ways to work smarter, not harder. You can learn more about her work at heatherhudson.ca.