How to help your team switch off on holiday: A guide for managers

In any business, maintaining employee wellbeing is crucial for sustainable success. As a manager, it's essential to encourage and support your team to fully switch off during their holidays. This not only benefits their mental health but also enhances their post-holiday performance.

Temps de lecture : minute

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In my book, <u>The Emotional Overdraft</u>, I emphasise the delicate – often ignored - importance of balancing business success with personal wellbeing. I introduce the concept of an 'emotional overdraft'—the strain caused by consistently expending more emotional and mental resources than one can replenish. In a 2022 survey, research by Slack revealed some worrying trends about holiday habits:

- 60% of employees plan to leave work notifications on during the holidays.
- 52% feel stressed and pressured by the expectation to be constantly available for work.
- 40% note it takes them one to three days to switch off during the holidays.
- Even among those who say they are not available for work, more than 43% check their work messages at least once a day.

These statistics highlight the need for clear boundaries and supportive policies to help employees disconnect.

Here's how you can help your team manage their emotional overdrafts

and fully disconnect during their holidays:

Recognise the emotional overdraft

An emotional overdraft occurs when employees use up more emotional and mental energy than they can replenish, leading to anxiety, stress, burnout, and decreased productivity. It's important to acknowledge that everyone, including you, operates with an emotional overdraft. By recognising this universal challenge, you can proactively monitor and address your team's emotional wellbeing. When you and your team members understand this concept, you'll also appreciate the benefits of rest and identify unhelpful behaviours that might prevent fully switching off. Make it something everyone in your company understands.

Understand key drivers

To effectively help your team switch off, it's important to understand the key drivers that might prevent them from fully disconnecting. Each team member may have different reasons for struggling to switch off. For instance:

- Trust: Some team members may only trust themselves to complete certain tasks. They need reassurance that their colleagues are competent and can handle responsibilities in their absence.
- Duty: Others might feel a strong sense of duty, believing it's their responsibility to keep things running smoothly. They need to understand that the team can manage without them.
- Empathy: Team members who overextend themselves to support others might need to be reminded that their own wellbeing is also important and that it's okay to take a break.

By identifying these drivers, you can address specific concerns and provide tailored support to ensure each team member feels confident

about taking time off.

Plan for time off before leave

To ensure your team can fully switch off during their holidays, it's important to plan and address any potential blockers. Engage in discussions with your team members before they go on leave. Here are some questions to consider:

- What do you need to be able to fully switch off when you're on leave?
- Is there anything you're working on that needs to be wrapped up before you go? Anything the team will need to pick up in your absence?
- Do you see any blockers to disconnecting from work entirely when you're on holiday?
- Is there anything stressing you about taking leave and/or that might prevent you from being able to relax?
- Is there anything that you need or that the team can help you with between now and your PTO date?

These open-ended questions can alleviate anxieties about taking time off by addressing potential issues beforehand. This process builds trust and gives team members peace of mind before going offline.

Set clear expectations

It's vital to set clear expectations about communication and availability during holidays. Ensure your team understands that they are not expected to reply to messages or be available in any capacity while on leave. Reinforce these expectations through everyday work practices and communication. For instance:

- Slack statuses: Encourage the use of 🌴 or 🏖 emojis as visual reminders

that someone is on holiday.
- Reminder messages: Managers or team members can send a Slack message about their leave or remind the team to check the latest availabilities in their weekly newsletter.
- Considerate communication: Preface messages with "For when you're back" or "This isn't urgent" to clarify that no immediate response is expected.

Create a culture that values offline time

Promote a culture that values time offline just as much as being online. For example, consider implementing a company-wide holiday during a quiet period to allow everyone to fully disconnect without fear of missing out. Additionally, engage in activities that celebrate time offline, such as weekly weekend "show and tells" where team members share how they spent their time away from work.

Practice what you preach

As a leader, I make sure to lead by example. As a leader I worked with said to me, "you cannot say you value someone's mental health whilst simultaneously not looking after your own". If you expect your team to fully disconnect during their leave, you need to do the same. Demonstrating the importance of switching off not only reinforces that no one is irreplaceable but also highlights the necessity of balancing work and personal life. This empathy towards the difficulty of tuning out work helps create a supportive environment for your team.

Key to this is to – where possible - avoiding sending emails out of hours to your team. After all, they will follow your lead. Instead schedule them to send the next morning. If you do need to send something out of office hours – be clear that you do not expect a response or for them to do the same.

Understand the importance of digital infrastructure

A study published in *Policy and Society* discusses the imperative role of digital transformation in modern workplaces. It emphasises that comprehensive digital infrastructure allows for better management of work-life boundaries, reducing stress and improving overall employee well-being. The use of digital tools like custom statuses, "Do Not Disturb" settings, and automated out-of-office replies helps employees to effectively switch off from work, ensuring that they can enjoy their time off without the stress of being constantly available. Leaving an out of office is essential, but if possible, also make sure it is forwarded on to another member of your team – so the individual on leave knows there is someone there to pick up anything urgent.

Helping your team switch off on holiday is key to lowering their emotional overdraft and maintaining a resilience, high performance organisation. By recognising the concept of an emotional overdraft, understanding key drivers by taking this _free self assessment_, planning effectively for time off, setting clear expectations, fostering a culture that values offline time, leading by example, and utilising digital infrastructure, you can create a healthier, more resilient workplace. Prioritising your team's mental health ensures long-term success and a sustainable work environment.

Andy Brown is the author of _The Emotional Overdraft: 10 Simple Changes for Balancing Business Success and Wellbeing._

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