

Should you 'protect' your free time from the demands of your job?

British workers are more stressed, more overworked and taking less holidays than ever.

Temps de lecture : minute

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When it comes to PTO, the amount of annual leave taken has dropped by almost 12% from 2020's figures. Last year, workers took an average of 34 days off, a study has found. That compares to 38 days a few years earlier, and if you work in financial services, the data shows you're taking 9.11% fewer vacation days.

That's depressing enough, but when you add in the fact that 53% of employees in the UK feel overworked, and 30% feel their employer has increased their work responsibility outside of their initial role, things seem even more bleak.

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- Corporate Tax Manager - Financial Services, Forvis Mazars, London
- Embedded Firmware Design Engineer - Hybrid, Paxton Access, Brighton

Those are the findings of recent analysis from Censuswide, which was commissioned by people analytics company Visier. The research also found that 32% of UK workers said they're expected to work outside of

contracted work hours, or are expected to ask their reports to do similar.

It's not surprising that 40% of respondents say their workload has given them anxiety, and 24% are at their mental limit.

From ingrained office cultures around over-performance to employees themselves working extra hours to try to ward off a layoff, there are many reasons why workers are doing more - often to their detriment.

Long hours don't add up

That's because long hours don't actually make you better at your job. What they tend to do is lead to significant health problems, like heart disease and impaired memory.

And there is a school of thought that it doesn't really matter whether you do all these extra hours at the behest of your manager anyway. In fact, one study found that managers had no idea which employees actually worked 80 hours a week compared to those who just pretended to.

In this case, developing a strategy around "performative busyness" where you tell everyone just how under pressure you are, and sigh a lot, may be just the ticket.

But this all adds up to a question around whether people need to begin to push back against unreasonable demands at work.

That sounds ideal on paper, but as a junior employee for example, you're very much at the mercy of your manager. If they want you to do something out of hours or take on tasks that are outside of your remit,

there's not a lot you can do.

Older employees and those with more seniority do have more wiggle room in this regard.

Consider the UK's new Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer. In a July 1st conversation with Chris Evans on Virgin Radio he said, "We've had a structure in place that I try to keep to, which is to carve out really protected time for the kids.

"So on a Friday - I've been doing this for years - I will not do a work-related thing after six o'clock, pretty well come what may. Now there are a few exceptions, but that's what we do."

It isn't the first time Starmer has made this claim. Last year, on the *Table Manners* podcast, he said something similar. "It's a question of trying to ensure that we find time, so I'm really, really clear, I will not do - unless it's absolutely urgent or a special reason - I won't do a Friday night event."

He also said that, "I don't believe in the theory that you're a better decision-maker if you don't allow yourself the space to be a dad."

For many, especially those in high-pressure roles, either setting that example yourself, or having the licence to assert some boundaries around work thanks to your peers putting their foot down, can be really useful.

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- Senior Risk & Assurance Manager, Companies House, Cardiff (£43,116-£47,965)
- IT & Operational Resilience Manager, PayPal, London

Consider that 66% of UK workers frequently work on their time off, with 23% bringing their work laptop or phone on holiday--therefore spending two-and-a-half hours per day on work-related matters.

Time off matters. Not only does it reduce any work-related stress you're suffering from, a switch-off period is essential to help you come back to work feeling refreshed and ready to go.

So, if you're not getting proper space for R&R, then taking a leaf out of the PM's book is an idea to try. But if your organisation or manager is adamant that out of hours work is not only expected, but more or less mandatory, making a job move to a company where downtime is valued may be your wisest choice.

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