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Art of zoning: How this KPMG partner ignores team calls

Switching off Simple steps can help balance work and home life.

Hannah Tattersall

Every evening when Naomi Mitchell gets home from work, she gets out of her car and heads into the house she shares with her husband and three daughters, leaving her briefcase, iPhone and Apple Watch in the car.

By day, Mitchell is 100 per cent focused on her work role as national managing partner of KPMG's private client practice, Enterprise. By night, until her children, aged 9, 12 and 15 are asleep, she is fully present at home.

Like Superman and Clark Kent – or Supergirl and Linda Danvers – ditching the work accoutrement helps Mitchell split her two identities.

"I call it zoning," she says. "I'm not dealing with the distractions that might be coming through from work while I'm dealing with what the kids have been through in their day. "But equally, from a work perspective, when I'm at work, I'm at work."

Being able to switch off mentally at the end of a working day is a challenge for many working adults, exacerbated by the expectation from workplaces that employees are contactable at all times of the day.

On top of portable computers and phones, there are now smartwatches, digital work platforms, social media apps and group chats to contend with, many designed to enhance productivity, but which frequently contribute to burnout and overwhelm.

A February survey conducted by US market research and analytics company The Harris Poll found 81 per cent of Gen Z adults and 78 per cent of Millennials wish they could disconnect from digital devices more easily, while the 2025 Pinterest Midyear Trends Report shows searches for digital detox ideas on the platform have increased 72 per cent on last year.

"We've become really good at communicating, but we've actually lost the art of connection," says Tim Jack Adams, the founder of employee wellbeing program GreenX7 and the author of *Energised*, which details how people can manage their energy more effectively to keep up with the demands of everyday life.

For those who can spare time in between leaving the office and heading home, experts encourage the use of a "third space" – a place between work and home where people can leave their negative energy.

"It could be a park, a beach, anywhere where you can sit on a park bench without your phone, even just for five minutes, take your shoes off, and just breathe through it," says Adams.

"You want to bring a positive energy into your household and not a negative one because if you're constantly bringing the negative energy in day after day, that's how you're going to be remembered."

If making time for a third space isn't possible, Adams says the most practical way people can go about setting boundaries is to have no devices at meal times.

"No TV, no phones, sit at the dinner table, have a good conversation," he says.

"Unfortunately, our phone is connected to work, so when we look at it, we think about work. The moment we leave it behind, we actually experience a sense of freedom."

Mitchell and her husband, Ben Murphy, a builder, don't ring each other during the workday unless it's absolutely necessary.

"We very much have time at home and then time at work," she says, which keeps work stress out of the home and home stress away from work.

Mitchell says she wasn't always a superhero. "They're skills I've acquired. When I had one daughter, I would pick her up from day care at 7 o'clock at night, and I'd be still on the phone telling this child in the back seat of the car, 'Be quiet, mummy's trying to do a phone call'.

"By the time I got to my third child, I had well and truly learnt to put the phone away."

Mum guilt is stronger than work guilt, Mitchell says. Her team knows she will always call them back.

"It might not be at 6 o'clock at night or 7 o'clock at night; it might be later. Quite often, I'll send a text. But with work, you can control it with more ease than the emotions of three young girls."

Ben Murphy and Naomi Mitchell try to prioritise daughters Lucinda, Jacinta and Katrina at home. PHOTO: SITTHIXAY DITTHAVONG

Authors Amy Jacobson and Tim Jack Adams seek to help people be present with their families outside work hours.

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Tim Jack Adams, GreenX7 founder

Amy Jacobson, author of *The Emotional Intelligence Advantage*, says it is natural for negative work energy to rear its head at home in the presence of people who love and care for us.

"Those built-up emotions and energy that we have been holding in at the workplace quite often explode the minute we arrive home when we are in our 'safe' environment," she says, adding there is an art to separating the two.

"Review and reflect on the day before you arrive home," Jacobson says, adding the third space could be the drive or commute home. "Maybe it's the last 10 minutes of the day. Maybe it's a shower the minute you walk in the door."

Meditation and breath work can assist in building the skill of being present, she says.

For those working from home, writing a to-do list at the end of the day might be enough.

"Simply getting those items that are floating in your mind down on paper will help to quiet the noise." People also needed to take ownership of their use of technology, by turning off notifications at home – or removing the device from view entirely.

A 2017 University of Texas study found placing a smartphone face-down or turning it off was nowhere near as effective as placing the device in another room when it comes to consuming brainpower.

"It is our choice to open an email or check a notification," says Jacobsen.

"Manage your time, boundaries and set expectations.

"Don't blame other people. You have control of when and how you choose to respond."

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