



Switching off from Work

I received an email recently with a suggestion for a challenge which read “get out of the office before 6 on a Friday with no intention of reading emails over the weekend”. Now I admit that I am very disciplined when it comes to my family time which I schedule to start at 4 p.m. on a Friday.

However, I fully appreciate that for many individuals, and particularly those with their own businesses or who are very conscientious about their work responsibilities clearing the desk on a Friday and stopping can be a serious challenge.

There are many different factors that can influence our ability to switch off from work and fully engage with our personal/family life. While considering the factors below, take time to decide if you can see yourself in them.

In many organisations there is a culture of expectation that you ‘should’ put in a 10 hour day. In these organisations if an individual consistently leaves the office at 5.30, then they are perceived to not be really doing the job properly. To me this approach is fundamentally flawed. It breeds a culture of filling in the time rather than working efficiently. I am sure that many of you reading this will be familiar with the individual who spends half the day at the coffee machine and then has to work late because they are under so much pressure.

A second area that can seriously challenge many people is technology. Twenty years ago when you walked out of the office, that was it. Now with the pervasiveness of email and mobile technologies you can always be available – but do you want to be? This can be particularly challenging for people who work with different time zones. If your work mobile is also used for personal contacts then once you have your phone/blackberry switched you are available for work. People in other time zones may legitimately ring or email you on Friday night or Saturday. Simply seeing the call or email coming in may be sufficient to draw you back into work mode. And yet you don’t want to miss the calls from your friends, so what do you do? Can you separate work and mobile numbers and addresses?

A third factor may simply be that you have developed some bad habits. This can be particularly true of individuals who work for themselves. In the early stages of the business these individuals may have been afraid they would miss a sale and always wanted to be available. This then becomes a habit and their customers develop the expectation that they can ring them at any time and not just during normal office hours. In this scenario, the individual must decide that they want to break the habit.

And so my challenge to you this week is to ensure that you take time this week-end to switch off. Set a time to stop work and stick to it. Prioritise your personal time and give it all your attention. If you recognise bad habits, you have the power to change them. First you need to decide you want to change, decide what the change will be and develop a plan to achieve this goal.

Warm Wishes

Mary