

MANAGING FREE TIME



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1

Warm up

In pairs, look at the pictures and answer the following questions.



picture 1



picture 2



picture3



picture4

1. How many hours per week do you typically spend working? Do you think this is above or below average? Why?
2. What is the first thing you usually do when you have finished work at the end of the week?
3. Are you able to stop thinking about work in your free time? Why/Whynot?
4. What activities do you usually do to relax?
5. Would you like to have more free time? Why/Whynot? What would you do with it if so?



2 Understanding the introduction

You are going to listen to a business person talking about managing free time. Number the extracts from the introduction in order from 1-8. The first one has been done for you.

a colleague while on a picnic with your family. We've convinced ourselves that these behaviours are no ____

And this is true even of our days off. Maybe you've taken a call at the beach, texted your boss from the grocery store or emailed ____

big deal. It's just one email. But there's a real cost to these interruptions, and there are smart strategies we can all take to better protect our time. ____

For so many of us, myself included, our days feel filled with a million small interruptions. 1

In one study, researchers recruited parents who were visiting a science museum with their kids. Some parents were told to check their phone as much as possible; ____

others were told to check their phone as little as possible. After the visit, parents who used their phones reported that the experience was significantly less meaningful. ____

These moments seem so small at the time, and yet research suggests they add up to a tremendous loss. The constant creep of work into our personal lives can increase our stress and undermine our happiness. So just what is the cost? ____

They also felt much lonelier. ____

Watch the first section of the video (00:00 - 01:07) to check your answers.

Now, find a word or phrase from the introduction that matches each definition.

- 1 _____ an event which stops something else happening for a period of time
- 2 _____ not something which is important
- 3 _____ significant or large
- 4 _____ something growing beyond its desired limits
- 5 _____ make something weaker
- 6 _____ get people to join a group or an organisation
- 7 _____ emotionally significant



3

Focus on vocabulary**Part A: Match the words to the definitions.**

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. <u>burnout</u> (n) | a. a feeling of being completely exhausted and unable to perform physically or mentally, usually because of working too much |
| 2. <u>productive</u> (adj.) | b. away of measuring something ,often performance |
| 3. <u>boundary</u> (n) | c. completing a lot of tasks |
| 4. <u>uphold</u> (v) | d. felt very strongly |
| 5. <u>accountable</u> (adj.) | e. give someone the space or the ability to do something |
| 6. <u>metric</u> (n) | f. give the authority to do something |
| 7. <u>profound</u> (adj.) | g. responsible for a task or a decision |
| 8. <u>empower</u> (v) | h. support something |
| 9. <u>accommodate</u> (v) | i. the limit of what is and isn't acceptable behaviour for someone |

Part B: Now put the vocabulary from Part A into the correct gaps in the sentences. You may have to change the form of the words.

1. Seeing how ill my father got from the stress from his job, had a _____ effect on the way I approach my working life.
2. The company gives me a lot of flexibility which allows me to _____ the demands of being a parent as well as a manager.
3. We spend so long in meetings at the moment that it is hard to feel _____ during the work day.
I found myself really struggling in the job because there weren't any clear _____ for me
4. to understand if I was doing well or not.
5. After such a positive performance review, I felt _____ to apply for a promotion.
6. I really felt that his comments in the meeting crossed the _____ of professional behaviour.
7. I'm sorry if I sound critical, but it's my job as a manager to _____ the highest standards of work.
She suddenly asked for two weeks of leave. I think she's suffering from _____
8. Sales have been falling all year and he's stressed because he knows he will be
9. held _____ for that, even though it's largely beyond his control.

Now in pairs, discuss the following questions.

1. What can you do to **empower** the people you work with in their roles?
2. Have you or anyone you know ever suffered from **burnout**? What happened? How did you/they deal with it?
Does your company **accommodate** the needs of its employees? Or could it do more?
- 3.

**4****Watching for details**

Watch the rest of the video (01:07 - 05:05) and decide which of the following pieces of advice the business person gives.

1. Spend 15 minutes sitting quietly after work to separate work from your free time. _____
2. Treat your weekend as if it was a holiday. _____
3. Make sure you get some exercise during the work day. _____
4. If you are not available, ask colleagues to only contact you in an emergency. _____
5. If you are able to, move a Monday deadline to a Tuesday afternoon to protect your weekend.

6. Create a list of what you need to do the next day before you leave work. _____

5**Comprehension**

Watch the rest of the video again (01:07 - 05:05) and answer the following

questions. 1. What did the experiment with the tourists who visited the church show?

- a. It was easier to communicate the experience to others when tourists had their phones with them.
 - b. Recalling specific details of the visit was harder for tourists who had access to their phones during that time.
 - c. Tourists who used their phones had access to greater amounts of information and therefore enjoyed the experience more.
2. What example does the speaker give of how work distractions can take away from personal life?
- a. She missed her first child's birthday due to working too late.
 - b. She texted a client while her first child was performing in a play.
 - c. She communicated with a client during an examination while she was pregnant.
3. How does the speaker suggest we think about the word "rest"?
- a. See it as time to proactively enjoy ourselves rather than just seeing it as dead time.
 - b. Look at it as time where you are allowed to do nothing and stay in bed if you need to.
 - c. Make it flexible and break it up with periods of work if it helps.
4. Which of the following suggestions does she make for enjoying yourself?
- a. Get a bike and cycle around your local area like a tourist to rediscover it.
 - b. Walk along way with no plan in mind and leave your phone at home.
 - c. Book a week end trip to Paris to see the Eiffel Tower.
5. What is the second suggestion that the speaker makes?
- a. Try varying your work hours, for example working ten hours one day and five the next.
 - b. Encourage people to go out for lunch once or twice a week to relax.
 - c. Set limits around your work time so that you are able to enjoy time off.



6. What suggestion does the speaker make to help with the second suggestion?
- Set aims for your free time with your colleagues and hold each other accountable for them.
 - Commit to cooking dinner in the evening for your family and honour that commitment.
 - Exercise with your colleagues so that you all feel fit and healthier.
7. What is the final suggestion the speaker makes?
- If you feel you're working too much, negotiate for a higher salary to compensate for your time.
 - Negotiate for time away from work during the week, such as spending an afternoon having a long lunch with colleagues.
 - Try asking for more time to deal with your various tasks so that you are less pressured.
8. What did the speaker's data reveal about the way some employees used their time?
- Employees who asked for more time did better quality work with fewer issues around stress.
 - Employers generally value employees who can quickly and efficiently complete tasks.
 - Time management was a key factor in whether employees were promoted or not.

6**Phrases in context**

In pairs, discuss the meaning of the underlined words and phrases in the following sentences.

- I think burnout is far more likely in this always-on culture that we live in.
- I spent too much time working when I was younger and got short-changed on time with my children and my family.
- A lot of people left the company in the wake of the restructuring and the impact it had on relationships. For people to be able to be productive, I think it's important to reframe how we think about time off.
- Employees who proactively look for feedback and confirmation do better with some managers than others.
- My ability to focus has been really fractured lately and it's affecting my productivity.

7**Talking point**

In pairs, discuss the following questions.

- Why do you think it is that some people work really long hours and have little personal time?
- In your opinion, are there problems with work/life balance in your workplace? Why/Why not?
- Does your company do anything that helps its employees address the problems of stress and burnout? What are they?
- What did you think about the suggestions that were made in the video? Were they useful to you? Why/Why not?
- What other suggestions can you think of that would help someone have a healthier balance of work and life?



8

Extended activity/homework

Read the writing task. You receive an email from a friend which talks about his work life. Read the following extract and write a reply giving them advice about the situation.

Work, however, is very hard. I like my job, but I work long days, frequently going in before 8 am and often staying until after 6 or 7. I often don't see the kids during the week because they are either too tired, or already in bed when I get home. Vanessa and I haven't been communicating very well. She gets annoyed because I'm always checking my phone for emails at the table, or reading reports in bed. I know I shouldn't do it, but if I leave work alone for too long, I worry that I might be missing something important. I even sometimes get up early at the weekend to do a little work before the family gets up so I can not be stressed when we spend time together. Honestly, I'm exhausted. I don't know how much longer I can keep this up.

You should:

- Write at least 250 words.
- Check your grammar, spelling and punctuation



Transcripts

2. Understanding the introduction

Speaker: For so many of us, myself included, our days feel filled with a million small interruptions. And this is true even of our days off. Maybe you've taken a call at the beach, texted your boss from the grocery store or emailed a colleague while on a picnic with your family.

Speaker: We've convinced ourselves that these behaviours are no big deal. It's just one email. But there's a real cost to these interruptions, and there are smart strategies we can all take to better protect our time. These moments seem so small at the time, and yet research suggests they add up to a tremendous loss.

Speaker: The constant creep of work into our personal lives can increase our stress and undermine our happiness. So just what is the cost? In one study, researchers recruited parents who were visiting a science museum with their kids. Some parents were told to check their phone as much as possible; others were told to check their phone as little as possible. After the visit, parents who used their phones reported that the experience was

Speaker: significantly less meaningful. They also felt much lonelier. In another study, tourists who were asked to have their phones out while visiting an iconic church remembered fewer details a week later. And in my research, employees who were paid for their performance spent increasingly less time interacting with friends and family, and more and more time interacting with colleagues and clients.

Speaker: These constant interruptions come at a cost to organisations, too. Companies lose 32 days of productivity each year to employee depression, which is often caused by the stress and burnout of our always-on culture. Despite knowing better, I, too, have found myself focusing on "urgent work distractions" over important life moments.

Speaker: Most recently, I found myself texting a client while in the middle of my first child's first ultrasound ... happy client, guilty mom-to-be. When you add up all of these moments, the sum total is a life short-changed on meaning, joy, connection and even memory. As we remake our models of work in the wake of the pandemic, now is our opportunity to create a new culture that respects time.

Speaker: And the way to make this really big change is through small steps that we can take right now. The first step that we need to take is to reframe rest. Reflect for a moment about what

Speaker: you think about when you hear the word "rest". Sounds amazing, right? But in my mind, I immediately worry about not being productive enough or letting down my colleagues.



Speaker: When we do have time off, we need to find ways in which we can enjoy the present moment and savour the leisure time that we have available, as opposed to seeing it as an unproductive barrier to our work. One specific strategy we can take is to treat our upcoming weekend like a vacation. On Friday afternoon, jot down how you would act and behave as if you were on a holiday. Maybe you and your partner will buy a bottle of wine and watch online clips of the Eiffel Tower.

Speaker: Maybe you'll visit a local cafe and listen to some live music. Or maybe you'll go for a long walk in the middle of the day with no phone and no agenda. The plan doesn't have to be expensive or extravagant. Another strategy you can take is to create clear boundaries for your time off. Instead of saying, "I'm out of the office. Feel free to Slack me whenever," say, "I'll be offline. Call me only if it's urgent." To uphold these personal goals, work together as a team. Set team goals for personal time.

Speaker: Do it publicly, collect data and hold each other accountable. These goals could sound like, "I will not check email between 6:00 and 8:00pm;" "I will have dinner with my family four nights a week;" or "I will go for a jog midday." Check in on your team's progress and see how everyone's doing. If you or your teammates are unsuccessful, work together to help accomplish personal goals.

Speaker: Lastly, you can negotiate for more time to prevent work from creeping into your personal life. In business school, I teach students to negotiate for salary but realise I spoke almost nothing about negotiating for more time. What does this look like in practice? You can ask for more time on adjustable deadlines at work. If your client asks for a deliverable Monday morning, ask for an extension until Tuesday afternoon so you don't find yourself working on your well-deserved weekend. And don't worry too much about reputation.

Speaker: Quality truly is the metric that matters most. In my data, employees who proactively asked for more time reported lower levels of stress and burnout, and were seen as more committed and professional by their colleagues. These are small but powerful changes to not only reframe rest, but to reclaim it. Once you discover the profound impact that these changes can have, you'll feel empowered to demand that others respect and accommodate your approach to time. Maybe they'll even feel inspired to piece together the fractured moments of their lives, too.