

Digital mindfulness

We are all aware of the benefits of digitalization and flexible mobile working. These advancements allow us to work from home or on the road at times. We can also access important information quickly and at any time, and we can be reached via several means of communication. It is efficient, saves time, and makes it easier to combine family and career. The flip side of the coin, however, is the expectation to be available at all times and in all places, which diminishes the boundaries between work and personal life, and causes stress due to information overload and an accelerated work pace. This in turn has negative consequences on our sleep and our general physical as well as mental well-being.

So, what can you do specifically to become more “digitally mindful”?

Rethink your perspective: How important is it to you to be digitally accessible? What do you expect from other colleagues, friends, or family? What happens when you’re not always online? Unless you’re a first responder, you’re usually not risking anything by not checking your email non-stop. If an emergency situation of high urgency or importance does indeed arise, you can rest assured that someone will call you.

Set up strict digital availability: Checking your emails, text messages and WhatsApp messages every few minutes out of habit is exhausting, distracting, and unproductive. Only check your messages when you have time to classify them. Which messages should be deleted, forwarded, put on the to-do list, or actually answered quickly? Since many of the messages we receive are neither very urgent nor very important, it is more efficient to configure digital availability selectively. It’s best to block out a time slot in your calendar for this.

Install technical blocks for computer and cell phone use: If you have trouble focusing on a particular task or get distracted by unnecessary internet use, it can be helpful to set up a tech block on your computer; for example, you can try the program Freedom (macfreedom.com).

If you are easily tempted to be distracted by your smartphone, something similar can be set up on your cell phone. For example, one option is to turn off push notifications and set app usage to only update apps manually (for example, for email apps). This may sound a

bit counter-intuitive at first, but there are apps that can help you reframe your phone usage. For example, the app “Offtime” lets you specifically decide which messages and calls you want to be available for by blocking certain apps for a certain amount of time. Or you can simply set your phone to do-not-disturb or airplane mode more often when you need to focus on a task.

Try explicitly addressing business-related availability within the team: For example, you may discover that you are not expected to answer emails on weekends just because a manager sends them on Saturday. It may also be necessary to clearly designate substitutes so that no one has to answer emails while on vacation. Providing a help desk or a dedicated point of contact for technical issues can also reduce “digital stress” among employees.

Create a list of alternative options or “offline” rituals:

- > Instead of eating lunch at the desk, you could sit in the lunch room or eat out
- > Try calling the person directly instead of sending an email
- > Put on a watch to check the time and don't look at your phone to do it
- > Buy an alarm clock so you don't get woken up by your phone first thing in the morning
- > If you can, just leave all digital devices in the office drawer after hours
- > Put your phone out of sight for a while – especially when you're having a conversation with other people

Train your impulse control directly and indirectly: Using digital devices requires self-discipline. A 15-minute exercise can help you increase your self-discipline. The best way to do this is to set a timer and focus on just one task for a full 15 minutes. You must wait 15 minutes before you can take a short break and read WhatsApp messages, for example.

And last but not least: Delete all social media apps on your phone. You still have access to them via your computer.

If you're struggling to get to grips with digital technologies despite our advice, then...

Call us in complete confidence.

0800 859 753

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