

Boundaries Matter: How to Draw the Line as a Remote Business Owner



Laura Spawn — March 19, 2020

Being the owner of a remote business certainly has its upsides—among them, the flexibility to work from home. But when your office is just down the hall from your living room, it can sometimes be hard to take advantage of that flexibility; after all, as a business owner, there always seems to be another task to complete or another email to respond to.

I've learned over the years that it's nearly impossible to find a perfect balance between your work and your personal life, especially as a business owner; the needs of the company will ebb and flow, as will your family's and even your own. But without setting some boundaries, it's easy to fall into the trap of saying you need just five more minutes at your desk and ending up there for hours.

Setting strategic boundaries allows business owners to make time for their personal relationships while also living up to all the responsibilities that come with running a remote-enabled company. Here are four ways to do just that so you can reach your business goals while still living a well-rounded life:

1. Set office hours—and stick to them

There will be times when you need to head out early or stay late, but determining regular office hours for yourself can help take some of the pressure off of you, your family, and your team members day-to-day. For remote business owners, this is especially important; after all, when work and home are the same place, it can be hard to switch off your “work brain” and focus on more personal matters, or vice versa.

If you haven't already, make it clear to your team and your family when you'll be online—and when you won't be. Knowing what to expect will make it easier for the people in your life to respect the boundaries you've set yourself; your employees will know not to expect a response after hours, and your family will know that once 6 p.m. hits, you're all theirs. If your schedule changes, communicate your new hours clearly to your team, including mentioning time zones if necessary.

It's not just for your team and your family's sake that you'll want to hold yourself to strict office hours, however; creating routines can improve your own efficiency and lower your stress levels. [Speaking with NPR in 2012](#), New York Times investigative journalist and author of “The Power Of Habit” Charles Duhigg explained that as many as 45% “of the decisions we make each day are actually habits, not really decisions.”

“The magic of habits,” Duhigg told NPR, “is that because our brain stops working around that behavior, it frees up mental activity for other things.”

Keep in mind also that your team will follow your lead when it comes to respecting your personal time. If you continue to send emails, make calls, and respond to Slack messages outside of your designated office hours, your clients and employees will start to expect responses in kind. Moreover, showing your team members that you aren't always available will let them know that it's OK for them to log off at the end of the day, too.

2. Protect your personal life

Along those lines, don't be afraid to set boundaries around your personal time, too. [A 2017 report](#) from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) suggests that being “always on”—i.e., readily accessible to your team through email, Slack, or other means—can blur the line between your work and home lives, and the issue is only compounded when you're the one in charge.

If it's feasible, keeping things separate by dedicating a phone line or a computer solely to business-related tasks can help you get in the zone each morning and mentally disconnect at the end of the day, but that isn't the only option. Some business owners use apps to “snooze” their notifications outside of office hours so they aren't tempted to respond to emails during family time, while others create separate profiles on their laptops or web browsers to keep business-related matters and files far away from your personal photos.

While it's understandable that as a business owner, you may need to put in some extra hours to keep the company running smoothly—especially when you're just starting out—remember that relationships thrive when we give them our undivided attention. Whether it's your significant other, your children, your friends, or other loved ones, don't be afraid to carve out a block in your schedule each week just for them.

3. Take charge of your workspace

With the TV blaring and kids and pets running around, working from your sofa can be challenging—though as a remote business owner, it's certainly tempting at times. Resist the urge to blend your home and your workspace by setting aside a designated area where you can work free of noise and other distractions. Even if it's small, having a spot in your house that is dedicated just to work can help you stay productive and on track throughout the workday, as well as help you disconnect when the work is done.

This works best when both you and the others living in your household understand what the expectations are surrounding your workspace. Let your loved ones know when you'll be working and how they should contact you if they need to reach you during office hours. While it can take some adjusting to, having a separate space for work can help you live a more productive and balanced life.

4. Remember the power of stepping away

If your mind seems to be flooded with to-do lists at all hours of the day or your morning shower seems like the only time you've had to yourself in months, it may be time to take a break. Time alone is critical to rejuvenation, even for extroverts, according to a [2016 study by the BBC](#).

With this in mind, try setting aside a few hours each week to engage your body and mind in an activity not directly involved with your work, like taking a painting class, hiking a local trail, or even getting lost in a book you're reading just for fun. It's important to give your mind a chance to recharge and reset, and hobbies like these can help boost creativity and productivity, as well—particularly if you keep up the habit.

Final thoughts

At the end of the day, it's important for me to be present both in my business and in my family, and drawing a clear line between the two helps me ensure I'm meeting all of my obligations without neglecting myself—or my team—the process.

i This article was written for **Business 2 Community** by Laura Spawn.

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Author: Laura Spawn

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