

6 things you don't owe your boss

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The typical workday is long enough as it is, and technology is making it even longer. When you do finally get home from a full day at the office, your mobile phone rings off the hook, and emails drop into your inbox from people who expect immediate responses.

While most people claim to disconnect as soon as they get home, recent research says otherwise. A study conducted by the American Psychological Association found that more than 50% of us check work email before and after work hours, throughout the weekend, and even when we're sick. Even worse, 44% of us check work email while on vacation.

A Northern Illinois University study that came out this summer shows just how bad this level of connection really is. The study found that the expectation that people need to respond to emails during off-work hours produces a prolonged stress response, which the researchers named telepressure.

Telepressure ensures that you are never able to relax and truly disengage from work. This prolonged state of stress is terrible for your health. Besides increasing your risk of heart disease, depression, and obesity, stress decreases your cognitive performance.

We need to establish boundaries between our personal and professional lives. When we don't, our work, our health, and our personal lives suffer.

Responding to emails during off-work hours isn't the only area in which you need to set boundaries. You need to make the critical distinction between what belongs to your employer and what belongs to you and you only. The items that follow are yours. If you don't set boundaries around them and learn to say no to your boss, you're giving away something with immeasurable value.

1. Your health

It's difficult to know when to set boundaries around your health at work because the decline is so gradual. Allowing stress to build up, losing sleep, and sitting all day without exercising all add up. Before you know it, you're rubbing your aching back with one hand and your zombie-like eyes with the other, and you're looking down at your newly-acquired belly.

The key here is to not let things sneak up on you, and the way you do that is by keeping a consistent routine. Think about what you need to do to keep yourself healthy (taking walks during lunch, not working weekends, taking your vacations as scheduled, etc.), make a plan, and stick to it no matter what. If you don't, you're allowing your work to overstep its bounds.

2. Your family

It's easy to let your family suffer for your work. Many of us do this because we see our jobs as a means of maintaining our families. We have thoughts such as "I need to make more money so that my kids can go to college debt-free." Though these thoughts are well-intentioned, they can burden your family with the biggest debt of all—a lack of quality time with you.

When you're on your deathbed, you won't remember how much money you made for your spouse and kids. You'll remember the memories you created with them.

3. Your sanity

While we all have our own levels of sanity to begin with, you don't owe a shred of it to your employer. A job that takes even a small portion of your sanity is taking more than it's entitled to. Your sanity is something that's difficult for your boss to keep track of. You have to monitor it on your own and set good limits to keep yourself healthy.

Often, it's your life outside of work that keeps you sane. When you've already put in a good day's (or week's) work and your boss wants more, the most productive thing you can do is say no, then go and enjoy your friends and hobbies. This way, you return to work refreshed and de-stressed. You certainly *can* work extra hours if you want to, but it's important to be able to say no to your boss when you need time away from work.

4. Your identity

While your work is an important part of your identity, it's dangerous to allow your work to become your whole identity. You know you've allowed this to go too far when you reflect on what's important to you and work is all that (or most of what) comes to mind. Having an identity outside of work is about more than just having fun. It also helps you relieve stress, grow as a person, and avoid burnout.

5. Your contacts

While you do owe your employer your best effort, you certainly don't owe him or her the contacts you've developed over the course of your career. Your contacts are a product of your hard work and effort, and while you might share them with your company, they belong to you.

6. Your integrity

Sacrificing your integrity causes you to experience massive amounts of stress. Once you realize that your actions and beliefs are no longer in alignment, it's time to make it clear to your employer that you're not willing to do things his or her way. If that's a problem for your boss, it might be time to part ways.

Bringing it all together

Success and fulfillment often depend upon your ability to set good boundaries. Once you can do this, everything else just falls into place.