

Is 40 hours a week enough? Yes and no...

 By Leigh Andrews

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With headlines about burnout and the impact of poor work-life balance a more frequent occurrence, how easy is it to just step away from your desk once you've done your eight hours for the day or 40 hours for the week, and only think about work again when you return the next day?



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The gig economy means most of us can only smile at this fairytale, rushing home to turn on another laptop or worse, living the freelance life where you're always on and time off is a luxury.

Goodbye weekends and evenings with friends, hello constantly juggling responsibilities and guilt at spending less time with your loved ones as you struggle to make ends meet.



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Boris Dzhingarov, ESBO 12 Feb 2019



You're likely in one of two camps on this – those who want to set up more structure, and those willing to go with the flow. Let's explore both options...

To-do lists and clear cut-offs

Some of us skip lunch to eat at our desks and cram in as much "I'm here" time as possible. But that's not healthy. Nor is deciding to 'just work from home' when you actually feel like you're at death's door.

It's a wonderful perk that you can do so, but you shouldn't feel you need to log in and 'be present' 24-7 – spend the day recuperating if you've been booked off on bed rest.

Reasonable overtime to complete business-critical tasks aside, be sure to set boundaries about when you're present and don't feel you need to check your emails long into the night, as it makes others who don't do so feel as though you're showing them up.

You won't necessarily need to go as far as France's 'right to disconnect' law, but it's interesting reading:



Work email overload: can the law lead a fightback?

5 Jan 2017



Nobody benefits if you work yourself to the bone. Take time off to focus on your other interests and take care of yourself. Self-care is crucial as we approach 2020. [Take this quiz](#) to find out if you're at risk of burnout, you may be surprised at the results.

So set aside time to clear emails, if your workload allows, then switch on an '[Inbox when ready](#)' type service to stop those distracting pop-ups on screen and switch focus to the tasks that require attention.

If you're in the creative industries, that's easier said than done as there are constant interruptions from ringing phones, people stopping by at your desk and the dread of that often lengthy commute.

If your workplace allows it, work from home every so often to switch up the pace of your routine and take care of yourself – stock up on healthy, nutritious food to snack on, make time to exercise, and set aside time for your hobbies.

Which links to the other extreme...

Go with the flow: Work anywhere, everywhere

I wrote for the second edition of [Fort Review](#) earlier this year that the secret to 24/7 creativity, for the sake of your sanity – and self-improvement, for that matter – to also try spend a little more time on your side hustle, especially if it feeds into your traditional 40-hour plus work week.

Because industry pressure is tough, but so is the pressure we put on ourselves to stay creative and at the top of our game.

This was clearly in action at the second official SheSays Cape Town event in August last year—attendees didn't write down just their names, but also their 'slash' or side hustle on their name tags.

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Every one of us had something to write down, whether it was blogger, photographer or part-time student. We all dedicate our spare hours to something we feel compelled to master, so why not find a way to incorporate that into the 'main hustle'?

Add some of your personal design flair the next time you're briefed to design a logo. Sure, there are rules and ways of working, but in no other industry do you have more power to say, "Let's try something like this," and run with it. After all, it's almost the year 2020! Time to stand up for ourselves!

Working towards work-life balance

The International Women's Day theme for the year is [#BalanceforBetter](#), and while gender equality is the obvious core focus, I suggest we also each make it a personal mantra to aim for better work-life balance.

“ This doesn't necessarily mean being regimented about the split – instead, forget it. Where your basic KPIs will allow it, let your work spill over into your after-hours life and your after-hours life spill into work hours. This is probably already happening, but you'd be amazed at how empowering it can be to acknowledge that and go with the flow. ”

This could mean heading out of the office earlier than usual to slot in a yoga session before finishing up from home with a clear head, or soaking up inspiration from others at industry events like morning entrepreneurial workshop sessions by Heavy Chef, and even at the weekly Wednesday lunchtime lectures run at Red & Yellow School.

Instead of draining my creativity, the fact that I'm constantly switching focus like this means there's always new inspiration to stoke that flame, whether it's part of my main hustle or my side hustle.

But whichever option sounds more like you, note that experts still recommend stepping away from your desk, so that you take the full break you're allocated.



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You don't have to spend money on a fancy meal that goes over the 60-minutes rush, either. Do something as simple as eating an energy bar while taking a walk around the block, meet a friend who works nearby for coffee, or go read a chapter of your current favourite in a quiet space.

Taking that break will refresh your mind and help your day feel more structured. Many of us balk at the thought as we 'have so much to do', but it's often said that the more you do, the more you can do.

This is true, especially if you're the local subject matter expert, but you can't be there 24/7 and chances are you'll want to explore other career opportunities down the line, so take the time to share your knowledge so others can help lessen your load and upskill themselves.

It's the best thing for you, and the business.

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