

# SA executives available 24/7

South Africa's senior executives are expected to be available around the clock, even on their days off or outside of working hours, a survey by executive search firm Jack Hammer Executive Headhunters shows.



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The survey was conducted amongst the country's leading employers, who were asked five questions relating to executive accessibility, and the results clearly show that although all-round access was not explicitly required in any employment contracts or service agreements, it was implicitly expected by almost all of the organisations.

Asked whether top executives were expected to be accessible after hours, 80% of companies gave an unequivocal 'yes', with only two companies responding 'no' along with the caveat, 'unless there is an emergency'.

## Senior management

Similarly, when asked whether senior management was expected to be available to the business on weekends and public holidays, 60% of companies answered 'yes' outright, with one company asserting that senior executives should be available at all times. The remaining respondents said top staff should be available in case of emergencies, and that although it is not a clear cut expectation, the fact of the matter is it happens as part of everyone's normal work routine.

"An interesting survey conducted by a US firm recently found that more than 80% of respondents continue to work after leaving the office, 69% cannot go to bed without checking their inbox and 38% routinely check their work emails at the dinner table," says Debbie Goodman-Bhyat, MD of Jack Hammer Executive Headhunters..

"The survey conducted by Jack Hammer supports these findings. All of the respondents indicated that although not explicit, the expectation is indeed for executives and senior management to be accessible outside of work hours, particularly - but not exclusively - to deal with crisis situations."

## No clear line

Goodman-Bhyat says that it is common practice for executives to reply to emails outside of working hours, and although concern is expressed for work-life balance, it is clear that work has irrevocably crossed the divide into what would previously have been considered personal time. "In an era of constant access to work communications via mobile and other devices, the line between the work and the personal life is no longer clear," she says.

Asked about whether respondents personally checked their work emails at the dinner table, before going to bed and on waking up, all of the surveyed company spokespeople gave a blanket affirmative, although two volunteered that the dinner table was the last refuge from work.

All the companies confirmed that they enabled after-hours accessibility by investing in technology through various mobile devices and internet connectivity for their executive and senior management-level employees.

"The expectation to be 'always on' has become a norm that most executives have come to accept. Some have figured out a way to integrate the ever-present 'office' into their personal and family lives so that it is not overly invasive, but many more struggle to find the balance, and very few are able to completely switch off," says Goodman-Bhyat.

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