The Edge: Unplug from business but remain responsive

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It wasn’t that long ago when small business owners functioned with one landline and a typewriter. If you needed to get in touch, you called during normal business hours.

If they were taking care of another client or out of the office, waiting another day or two to connect was not uncommon. You may have mailed a letter and waited a couple of weeks for a response. Today, business owners connect with their clients with cell phones, fax, email and multiple social media platforms. As a result, standard customer service suggests that we should reply to clients almost immediately upon contact, regardless of what day or hour.

The more technology advances, the higher the bar of expectation rises. These pressures have a significant impact on small business owners.

Despite the “standard” expectations, we are each responsible for setting limits to our availability for personal health and professional success.

As a therapist who specializes in working with professional women, one of my guiding business principles is to be engaged — respond promptly to professional and client meetings, emails and
phone calls — and always model professionalism, respect, care and concern. I value the importance of communication, but I am also up-front with my clients and specific about when I am available and when I am not.

How can you balance limits of availability while remaining engaged? By following three rules:

• Set your working hours.

• When you are working, work hard and be very attentive to your clients.

• When you are not working, you are NOT available.

The benefits are priceless. It allows you to be more mindful to what is happening in the present. Mindfulness promotes a balanced lifestyle that leads to optimal physical, mental and emotional health. The bottom line is that when you are physically, mentally and emotional healthy, you are much more likely to be professionally successful.

My clients have expressed appreciation for my limits of availability. It models for others how to make personal health a priority. You can be flexible on your availability for busy clients, but be up-front about your limits. It allows clients to have clear expectations and consistency.

To reach a true level of mindfulness, I suggest the following practices of “unplugging” during non-work hours:

• Have scheduled times when you turn your cell phone off. (Examples: In the car and at dinner.)

• Have scheduled times when you log out of your email and social media.

• Practice quietness by turning off the TV, radio and all other technology.

Following these guidelines might be harder than you expect at first.

Let your loved ones in on your challenge for accountability and encouragement.

“To be mindfully engaged is the most natural, creative state we can be in.” — Ellen Langer

Kristin Woodling is the owner of Pamper Your Mind, LLC, a private group of experienced counselors who provide confidential and elite therapeutic experiences to professional women seeking to recover, rejuvenate and revive their life.