

Reattaching to work is just as important as detaching from work, study finds

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Research has increasingly shown that an employee's ability to mentally detach from work and recoup during non-work hours is important for their well-being. But a new study co-authored by a Portland State University professor suggests the opposite is just as important: employees who mentally reattach to work in the morning are more

engaged at work.

The study, published in the *Journal of Management*, showed that planning and mentally simulating the upcoming workday triggers [work](#)-related goals. During reattachment, employees think about what will happen during the day, the tasks that have to be accomplished, any potential challenges that might arise, as well as the support and resources they might need to accomplish their goals.

"We know that detachment from work during non-[work hours](#) is important because it creates [positive outcomes](#) like higher life satisfaction and lower burnout," said Charlotte Fritz, a co-author and associate professor of industrial-organizational psychology in PSU's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. "Now we need to think about helping people mentally reconnect to work at the beginning of their work shift or day so they can create positive outcomes during their work day and be immersed in their work. It's not enough to just show up."

The study surveyed 151 participants from a broad range of industries, including finance, the [energy sector](#), [public administration](#), information and communication and [health sector](#).

Fritz said an [employee](#)'s reattachment to work can vary from day to day and will depend on the person and their job. For example, she said employees can think about specific tasks that need to be done over breakfast or in the shower, mentally go over a conversation with a supervisor during their commute, or run through their to-do list while standing in line for a coffee.

"Through reattachment, employees are able to activate work-related goals, which then further creates positive experiences which allow people to be more engaged at work," Fritz said. "Engagement is a sense of energy, sense of feeling absorbed, feeling dedicated to work, and

those are all very important motivational experiences that translate to positive outcomes for both employees and organizations. They're more satisfied with work, more committed to work, enjoy work tasks more, perform better and help out more with extra tasks."

The researchers suggest that organizations develop norms and routines that help employees reattach to work and support them in smoothly transitioning into the workday. It could be allowing them a few quiet minutes at the start of the day, initiating a short planning conversation about the upcoming workday, encouraging them to prioritize their most important goals, offering short checklists, or even providing them with more autonomy on the job to complete specific tasks.

"Organizations need employees who are highly engaged, and reattachment is key," Fritz said.

More information: Sabine Sonnentag et al, Morning Reattachment to Work and Work Engagement During the Day: A Look at Day-Level Mediators, *Journal of Management* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0149206319829823](https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206319829823)

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