

Improving your work-life balance can make you a more effective leader at work

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Silencing your notifications and ignoring your email at the end of the workday could make you a better leader at your job, according to new research.

Managers who disconnected from their jobs at home felt more refreshed

the next day, identified as effective [leaders](#) and helped their employees stay on target better than bosses who spent their off hours worrying about work.

Less-experienced leaders were especially prone to becoming ineffective if they spent their time focusing on their jobs at home.

The upshot is that the key to effective leadership in the office might be a better [work-life balance](#). Led by scientists from the University of Florida, the University of Arizona and Florida State University, the new study was published April 6 in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

"The simple message of this study is that if you want to be an effective leader at work, leave work at work," said Klodiana Lanaj, a professor in UF's Warrington College of Business who led the research. "This is particularly important for inexperienced leaders, as they seem to benefit the most from recovery experiences when at home. Leaders have challenging jobs as they juggle their own role responsibilities with the needs of their followers, and they need to recover from the demands of the leadership role."

The study surveyed managers and their employees at U.S. businesses in 2019 and 2022. The researchers assessed leaders' ability to disconnect from work when at home the night before and their level of energy and how strongly they identified as a leader in the morning at work. Employees rated their bosses on their ability to lead their teams.

"What we found is that on nights when leaders were able to completely turn off and not think about work, they were more energized the next day, and they felt better connected to their leadership role at work. On those same days, their followers reported that these leaders were more effective in motivating them and in guiding their work," Lanaj said.

"But on nights when leaders reported that they were thinking about the negative aspects of work, they couldn't really recuperate their energy by the morning," she said. "They saw themselves as less leader-like and they weren't as effective, as rated by their followers."

How to improve work-life balance

So how can leaders—and businesses—promote this kind of work-life balance to build effective leaders?

"My hope is that this study will give managers data to support their decision to be present at home and to disconnect from work," Lanaj said.

While Lanaj's study didn't ask [managers](#) how they relaxed at home, other research points to well-known ways to unwind and reset: Exercise, socialize with friends, spend quality time with family, or engage with TV shows, books or hobbies. What helps one person leave work at the office might not help another. The key, Lanaj says, is to find the methods that let you decompress from work as much as possible.

And businesses that want the best out of their leaders on the job should help them recharge at home. Reducing after-hours emailing and expectations for on-call work is one way to do that.

Tech fuels a lot of this after-hours work, but also might offer a solution. You can set your phone to disable notifications after a certain hour or leave work devices in a dedicated office.

"You can start small," Lanaj said. "Say, 'After this time in the evening, I won't check my work email.' See where that takes you."

More information: Klodiana Lanaj et al, The importance of leader

recovery for leader identity and behavior., *Journal of Applied Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1037/apl0001092](https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001092)

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