The Rewired Resolution

8 Ways to Work Smarter, Live Better, and be More Productive

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Resolving to Rewire

The New Year is the time for new beginnings and fresh starts, but really, anytime works for resolving to rewire from our hectic, overwired lives. This eBook will guide you through the eight rewiring steps to work smarter, live better, and be more productive in your professional and personal lives. By the end, you will be equipped with the knowledge and techniques to eliminate an overwired existence. Let's begin.

First, STOP. Shut down all devices, including the worries and to-do lists in your brain. Seriously—turn off the computer and mobile devices and step away from the TV or conversations in the room or office. Reboot your brain and open a clean page.

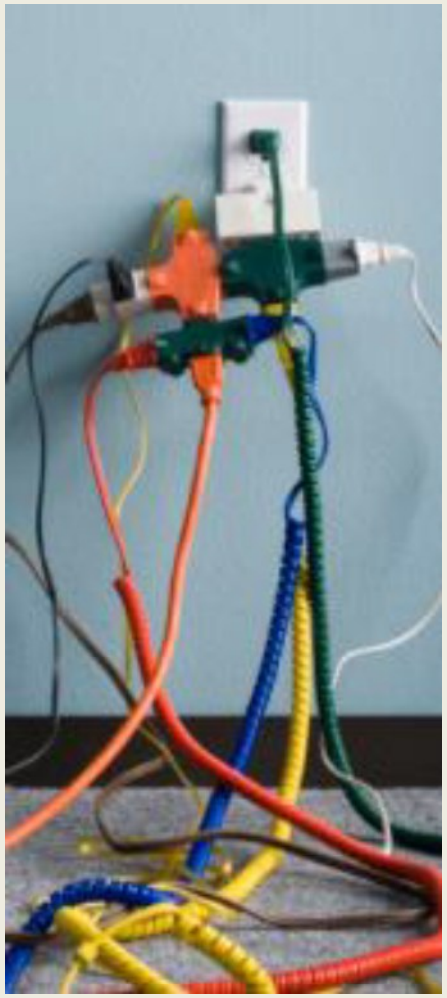
It is now time to rewire. Let us first discuss what it means to be overwired. Then walk through the eight steps to rewire your processes and actions, which will make your future organized, prioritized, and efficient—not to mention happier. Here are the eight steps to rewire:

1. **STOP: Running full out. START: Recharging regularly.**
2. **STOP: Letting technology use you. START: Using technology.**
3. **STOP: Shifting clutter. START: Organizing and simplifying.**
4. **STOP: Worrying about work/life balance. START: Focusing on doing more of what energizes you and less of what depletes you.**
5. **STOP: Multitasking. START: Unitasking.**
6. **STOP: Saying "yes." START: Saying "no."**
7. **STOP: Being available 24/7. START: Setting boundaries.**
8. **STOP: Playing catch up. START: Getting out in front.**

What Does Overwired Mean?

Overwired means firing on all cylinders, overtaxing our brains and bodies, and never allowing either to rest or rejuvenate properly. It means multitasking, multithinking, and never really being present with the task at hand or the people in our lives. It means feeling wired, even when we are not actually in front of a computer or at work.

Being overwired is an expensive problem, both in terms of the costs to our mental and physical health and in the loss of productivity at work. Conservative estimates suggest that overwired employees—defined as workers who multitask, are unfocused, and overwhelmed—making $100,000 annually cost companies over $46,000 each in lost productivity and quality of work.[1]



We don't have to be overwired. We can *resolve to rewire*. Ask yourself:

- Do you want to be more productive and efficient at work?
- Do you want to learn to set boundaries?
- Do you want to be more present in your life?
- Do you want to make more time for the people and things you love?
- Do you want to say "no" to the things that distract you?
- Do want to create space to work smarter and live better?

The key is STOP doing the destructive things that prevent our purposeful productivity and START doing the small but important things that improve the way we work and live. Once we resolve to do so, we can see more clearly, think with greater clarity, and focus with

[1]Evans, J., Meyer, D., & ubinstein (2001). J..Executive control of cognitive processes in task switching. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance 27(4),* 763-797.
Bartlein, B. Multitasking madness decreases productivity: why you may not be doing as much as you think. Retrieved from http://www.career-intelligence.com/management/Multitasking_Madness_Decreases



Eight Steps to STOP *Overwiring* and START *Rewiring*

STEP 1
STOP: Running full out.

In order to rewire ourselves, we first have to stop the madness of going full tilt 24/7 and *unwire* so that we can recharge ourselves on a regular basis. We know from neuroscientists and the medical community that the brain and body require periods of rest so that our cells can grow and rejuvenate. In the same way that an athlete rests his muscles after a big work out, we have to rest our brains and bodies, too. This is done by unwiring.



START: Recharging regularly.

I mean this literally. We have to actually unwire ourselves from all the technology, screens, and gadgets and step away from it all. Most people aren't actually wired to anything anymore; we're all wireless these days. But this has actually made us more "wired." We are always able to be reached. Technology is no longer at arm's length; it's at our fingertips. Constantly. We have to unwire from it and step away so that we are able to recharge. The good news is that we don't have to take a four-day retreat; we can unwire in small but meaningful ways throughout the day:

- Start your day unwired. Don't look at your smartphone or e-mail before you've had your morning coffee or breakfast.
- Enjoy a silent commute—no radio, no e-mail, no texting.
- Arrive at the office a few minutes early and take five minutes to think about your day before diving into your e-mail and phone calls.
- Write a concise to-do list for the day. Label two columns: Must-do / Should-do.
- Have phone-free lunches. Think: Do you really need to be available?
- At lunch, eat outside or take a walk rather than surf the Internet as you eat at your desk.
- Resist the temptation to take your phone to the bathroom or break room.
- Try to unplug for five minutes or so every hour. Get up from your desk, stretch, walk around, step outside, etc. And leave your phone behind.

Five or 10 minutes here and there may not sound like a lot, but it all adds up. You will be amazed at the impact these short periods of unwired time have on your rejuvenation. The key is to punctuate your day—and evenings, too—by unwiring.

STEP 2
STOP: Letting technology use you. START: Using technology.

Because the wired world is always at our fingertips, we have conditioned ourselves to be available to *it*. We sometimes feel like technology is using us. But the great thing about technology is that it can make our lives easier and more efficient. The key is to use simple technology properly on our own terms. The two most common complaints from my clients are e-mail overload and feeling chained to smartphones.

8 Steps to Tackle Email:

1. It's your inbox. Take control of it!
2. Before opening anything, delete all non-essential messages.
3. Learn how to use your spam filter.
4. Get off all e-mail lists. Unsubscribe and don't sign up in the first place.
5. Create a separate, personal e-mail address just for online orders, junk mail, RSS feeds, newsletters, etc.
6. Establish a clear protocol with colleagues about when to cc, so you don't get unnecessary e-mails.
7. Consider a cloud solution where you can remotely access your work computer from anywhere so you don't have to be tethered to your desk to get to your emails.
8. Train yourself not to respond every time you see a new e-mail icon. Better yet, turn off that function. Even better, pick four or five times a day when you will open, read, and respond to e-mails.

4 Steps to Tackle the Smartphone:

1. Be liberal with caller ID.
2. Let calls go to voicemail.
3. Do not have work calls forwarded to your smartphone unless you have to.
4. Let callers know when you will return calls.
5. Allow yourself freedom from the office by having an easy to use online meeting app, such as GoToMeeting, to attend meetings anywhere.









By using technology properly, we can prevent it from using and overwhelming us. Use it your advantage.

STEP 3
STOP: Shifting clutter.

Clutter is distracting—really distracting. In fact, researchers at Princeton's Neuroscience Institute reported that clutter actually inhibits the brain's ability to focus and process information because it vies for your energy and attention.[1] Just like computers slow down when too many windows or too many programs are open, we slow down when we have too much stuff taking up physical space. So, to think and perform better, get rid of the clutter and get organized.

START: Organizing and simplifying.

Here's how:

- Take a look at your desk or office.
- Is it well organized or cluttered?
- Can you find what you need?
- Throw out or file papers you don't need.
- Develop a system where you touch a paper or e-mail only once.
- Organize your supplies and files so you can find them.
- Do you have too many personal items in your office? Or not enough?
- Does this distract you from being present or purposeful?
- What do you absolutely need to be productive and focused?

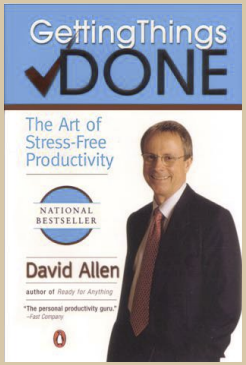
Is there something draining you and not adding value to your work or your life? Get rid of it. You want to create an environment that is energizing and helps you stay productive and focused, not one that distracts you with clutter. Do this at home, too.

Organizing and simplifying.

Getting Things Done
by David Allen

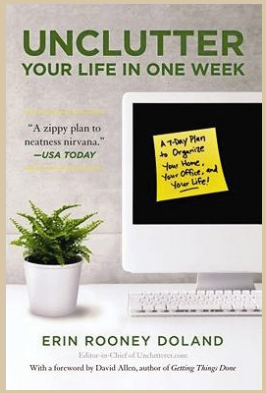
This must-read book creates a play-by-play strategy for how to get rid of distractions and get things done.

Allen's near cult-**like following of self-**proclaimed "GTDers" **are living testimony to his impact.**



[1]***Unclutter Your Life in One Week***
by Erin Rooney Doland

Organization expert Erin Rooney Doland will show you how to clear the clutter, simplify your surroundings, and create the stress-free life you deserve—in just one week.



STEP 4.
STOP: Worrying about work/life balance.

Work/life balance is a tricky thing. We all beat ourselves up for not being home more, or present more, or "there" for more people. Instead of worrying about achieving work/life balance, we should focus instead on doing the things we love and being with the people who energize us. Do less of the things that deplete you.

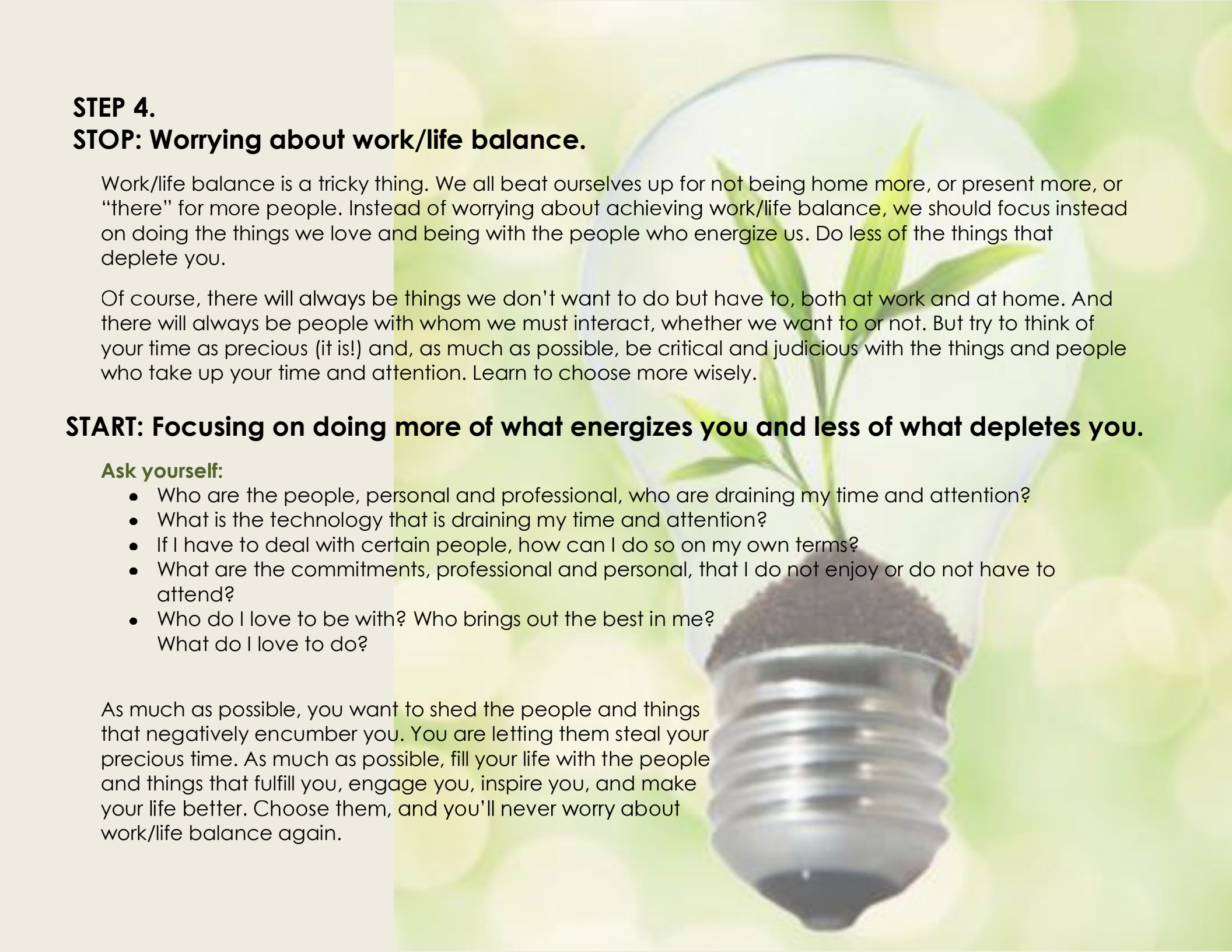
Of course, there will always be things we don't want to do but have to, both at work and at home. And there will always be people with whom we must interact, whether we want to or not. But try to think of your time as precious (it is!) and, as much as possible, be critical and judicious with the things and people who take up your time and attention. Learn to choose more wisely.

START: Focusing on doing more of what energizes you and less of what depletes you.

Ask yourself:

- Who are the people, personal and professional, who are draining my time and attention?
- What is the technology that is draining my time and attention?
- If I have to deal with certain people, how can I do so on my own terms?
- What are the commitments, professional and personal, that I do not enjoy or do not have to attend?
- Who do I love to be with? Who brings out the best in me? What do I love to do?

As much as possible, you want to shed the people and things that negatively encumber you. You are letting them steal your precious time. As much as possible, fill your life with the people and things that fulfill you, engage you, inspire you, and make your life better. Choose them, and you'll never worry about work/life balance again.



STEP 5
STOP: Multitasking.

These days, people often wear their "ability" to multitask as a badge of honor. We've all been there: Sitting at our desk, computer humming, files open, checking e-mails, talking on the phone, and listening to a colleague all at the same time. Impressive, yes? No. It's neither impressive nor effective. This is the myth of multitasking.

When we multitask, our brain shifts back and forth rapidly between two or more tasks, but, because our brain cannot process two different thoughts simultaneously, this decreases performance and takes more energy, creating cognitive drain. We just don't do a thorough job when we multitask.

START: *Uni*tasking.

Instead, we should *unitask*, which means to do one thing at a time. This is a tricky idea for most of us, since we're accustomed to doing three things at once. Unitasking requires a bit of brain retraining. Here's how to do it:

- Focus on one thing at a time.

- When you read an e-mail, read only that e-mail. Focus on the words.
- When you talk on the phone, talk on the phone. Focus on the conversation.
- When someone is speaking to you, stop what you are doing, look them in the eye, and listen to what they are saying.
- When you wash dishes, wash dishes. Focus on the water and the dish in your hands.
- When you walk, walk. Focus on nature and the air around you (rather than on the screen of your smartphone or your to-do list).
- When you drive, drive. Focus on the road and the drivers around you.

The key is to be mindful of exactly what we are doing when we are doing it. If another thought or urge pops into your head, acknowledge it, but then return your focus. When your mind wanders, bring it back. Unitask.

STEP 6

STOP: Saying "yes."

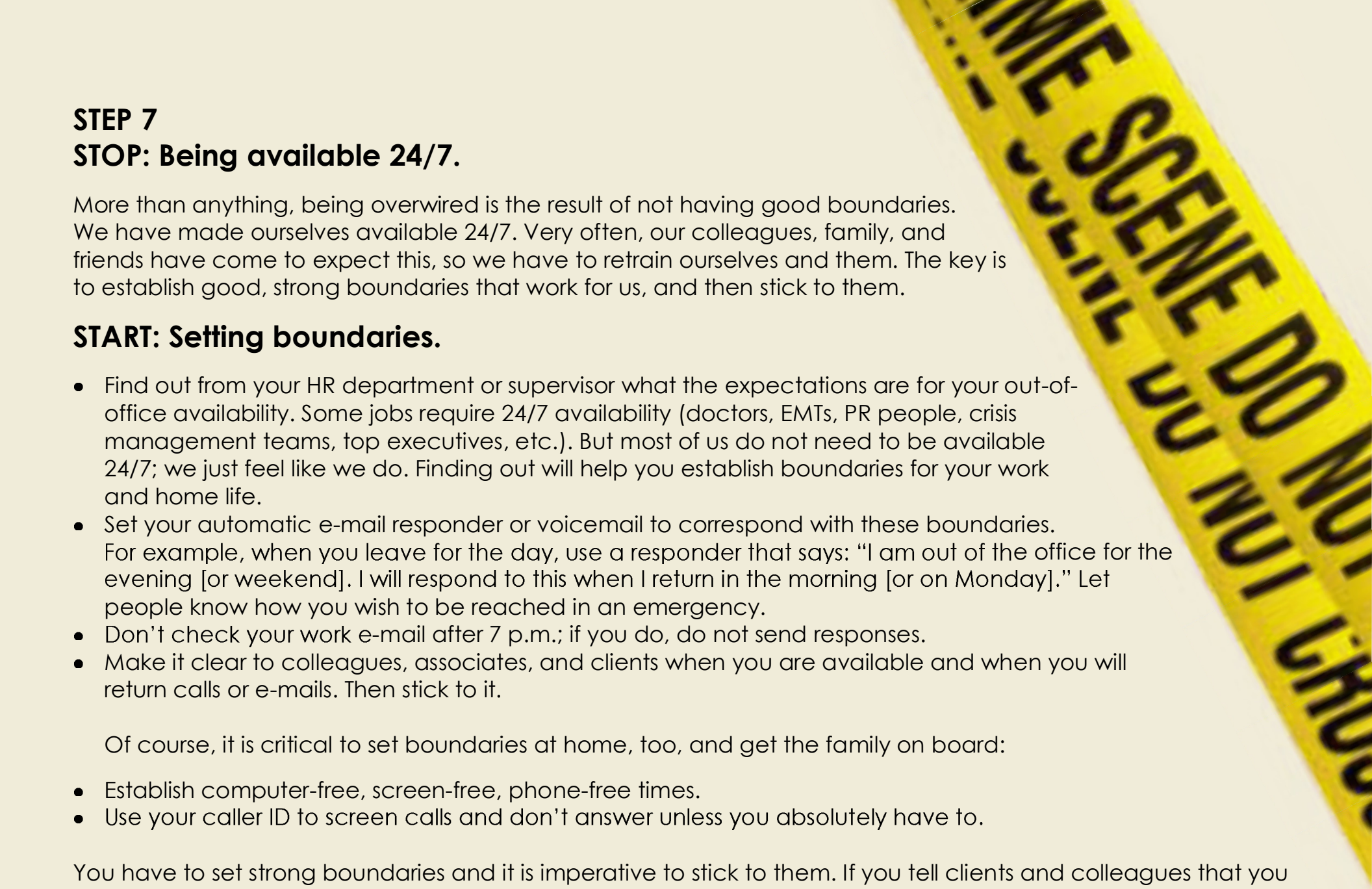
This goes hand-in-hand with #4. In rewiring our lives, it is very important to be cognizant of what we say "yes" to. We say "yes" to far too many things, maybe in an attempt to assuage guilt, be a team player, or be seen as someone who can do it all. However when we say "yes" to too many things, we may be saying "no" to some very important things, too. Stop saying "yes" automatically. And start saying "no," or at the very least, say "let me think about it."



START: Saying "no."

- Implement a 24-hour pause period before accepting any invitations.
- Learn to say, "Thank you. Let me think about it and I will get back to you tomorrow."
- Think about what you will get out of it and if it is worth your precious time.
- Get off boards or committees that you don't enjoy.
- Say "no" to lunch dates or events that you don't need or enjoy being a part of.
- Say "no" to meetings and events that are not mandatory.
- Only do volunteer work if you enjoy it. If it feels like a chore, change your focus or stop doing it.
- Withdraw from commitments that are not fulfilling.

Again, think of your time as precious. When you say "no" to something you may be able to say "yes" to more of the things you *do* want in your life.



STEP 7
STOP: Being available 24/7.

More than anything, being overwired is the result of not having good boundaries. We have made ourselves available 24/7. Very often, our colleagues, family, and friends have come to expect this, so we have to retrain ourselves and them. The key is to establish good, strong boundaries that work for us, and then stick to them.

START: Setting boundaries.

- Find out from your HR department or supervisor what the expectations are for your out-of-office availability. Some jobs require 24/7 availability (doctors, EMTs, PR people, crisis management teams, top executives, etc.). But most of us do not need to be available 24/7; we just feel like we do. Finding out will help you establish boundaries for your work and home life.
- Set your automatic e-mail responder or voicemail to correspond with these boundaries. For example, when you leave for the day, use a responder that says: "I am out of the office for the evening [or weekend]. I will respond to this when I return in the morning [or on Monday]." Let people know how you wish to be reached in an emergency.
- Don't check your work e-mail after 7 p.m.; if you do, do not send responses.
- Make it clear to colleagues, associates, and clients when you are available and when you will return calls or e-mails. Then stick to it.

Of course, it is critical to set boundaries at home, too, and get the family on board:

- Establish computer-free, screen-free, phone-free times.
- Use your caller ID to screen calls and don't answer unless you absolutely have to.

You have to set strong boundaries and it is imperative to stick to them. If you tell clients and colleagues that you are not available after 5 p.m. or on weekends, but then respond to them after 5 p.m. and on weekends, they will expect this and you will have undermined your boundaries. People have to understand what your boundaries are and then you must be consistent in enforcing them.

STEP 8
STOP: Playing catch up.

Another part of being overwired is feeling like you are always playing catch up. To rewire, you have to get out in front of things.

START: Getting out in front.

This requires four simple planning strategies:

1. Look ahead and create space. When you can anticipate more than five minutes ahead, you move from crisis management to productive living. Try to think ahead and be strategic. What is coming up?
2. Set aside a five-minute block of time each morning and evening to get organized for that day, the following day, and the week ahead.
3. Plan your meetings. Whether they are at work, at school, or with your family, be organized and prepared. Set a time limit and an agenda.
4. Schedule backups to your critical data. This provides peace of mind.

The more order and organization we have and the more we look ahead, the better we become at managing our work and home life.



Rewired for Wellness

Resolving to rewire means making small but significant changes that can add up to profound productivity and personal fulfillment. Little tweaks, here and there, consistently employed, can lead to big results. We can all learn to live healthy and productively in an overwired world if we simply resolve to rewire.



About Author & Sponsor



Camille Preston, PhD, is the founder and CEO of AIM Leadership, an organizational development company committed to developing powerful, authentic leaders. She is a pioneer in the field of Virtual Effectiveness and the author of Rewired: How to Work Smarter, Live Better, and Be Purposefully Productive in an Overwired World, from which this article was adapted.

For more than twenty years, Camille has guided executives, policy makers, and individuals alike to new heights of leadership, performance, effectiveness, and greater happiness and fulfillment. AIM is one of the country's premier consulting firms with clients around the globe, including Harvard University, the Asia Foundation, NBC, Zappos, Verizon, GE, and the US Army. Camille also serves as an adjunct faculty member for the MIT Sloan Innovation Period.

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