

Unanswered Questions

1. It's tricky to balance between rest and work, even when we are away our minds are focused on issues at work. How can we mentally disconnect?

FM: First of all I agree, this can be very challenging, particularly when so many of us are tethered to our work phones/emails/notifications and often receive notifications and messages outside of work. Secondly, there are certain types of work-related concerns that stay with us even during our time off. Finally, if you work with high trauma content (e.g. clients going through difficult, traumatic situations), it may feel hard to go "off duty" when you know that they don't get to do that, or some stories may hitch a ride with you. Here are a few suggestions:

- 1) Creating a system shutdown ritual (e.g. not consulting your work phone/computer outside of work hours unless you are on-call). If your workplace expects you to still monitor your devices, that's a problem at another level of your workplace, which is beyond the scope of this answer. I am a big fan of the work of Cal Newport, an expert in productivity, who wrote an excellent book called [Deep Work](#). Deep Work explores ways to disconnect in a myriad of concrete strategies. I also loved Tony Crabbe's book "[Busy](#)" which also makes some excellent and actionable suggestions to "go off duty." I have a friend who is a child psychiatrist in a very busy hospital and she took her email app off her phone during her christmas holidays, and she realised that she did not need to check her inbox on vacation. She also noticed that no one noticed at work that she had done this. She returned to work and did not re-install it on her smartphone.
- 2) The second challenge is related to exposure to difficult/traumatic stories. If that is why you are struggling with disconnecting, I would recommend reading my book "[The Compassion Fatigue Workbook](#)" as well as Laura Van Dernoot Lipsky's [Trauma Stewardship](#) as a great starting place.

2. For those on the frontline who are all being treated as though we are in the "same boat" (having to go back to the office full-time and given stress balls), how do you suggest we try to communicate our actual needs to our employers and how our health is just as important as client service?

FM: This is a concern that I have heard many times over the past two years. I try to work with leadership with a collaborative lens and try to educate them about what a mistake this is, and one with costly potential consequences. I loved Jeffrey Pfeffer's book "[Dying for a Paycheck](#)" which talked about this pre-pandemic but even more timely and relevant is Jennifer Moss' brand new book: [The Burnout Epidemic](#). I would start with Moss' book.

Sometimes, leaders who never worked front-line don't understand or see what the problem is with this approach until they are faced with a labour dispute or a mass staff shortage. But in general, in my experience, it's about finding the leaders (formal or informal) who have an understanding of what is compassionate leadership and why perception of fairness has a huge impact on worker productivity.