

3 Ways to (Actually) Disconnect from Work



disconnect-from-work

What would you do if I told you to stop thinking about yellow ties?

Your brain would *instantly* focus on yellow ties. The more you tried to shift your focus away from the yellow tie, the more you'd obsess over it.

There's a secret hidden here.

It's the secret to truly disconnecting ourselves from work.

Why your best ideas come to you in the shower

Neuroscience has the answer.

Dr. Alice Flaherty, renowned neuroscientist at [Mass General](#) shares the simple answer.

Dopamine.

That's right, dopamine. It's the neurotransmitter that makes you feel good. Dr. Flaherty, explains the effects dopamine has on our creativity.

"People vary in terms of their level of creative drive according to the activity of the dopamine pathways of the limbic system."

Did you catch that?

Hundreds of activities we find enjoyable – taking a warm shower or bath, exercising, driving, eating good food, sleeping – these all trigger the release of dopamine. The more dopamine we have, the more *creative* and *productive* we become.

There's another ingredient missing.

Distraction.

Dr. Shelley Carson researcher, psychologist and author of *Your Creative Brain* says distraction is actually [a good thing](#).

"If you are stuck on a problem, an interruption can force an 'incubation period,' in other words, a distraction may provide the break you need to disengage from a fixation on the ineffective solution."

This teaches us two important things.

1. Stress decreases our ability to come up with creative and productive solutions to our problems
2. When we're stuck we tend to obsess on what doesn't work.

This is why we struggle to disconnect from work.

We take our work home with us. We focus and obsess about problems we can't really fix at the moment. We ruminate on our day, on the difficult parts of our job. It's unfair and makes it *more* difficult for us to do our jobs well.

Disconnecting from work is impossible...

On its own.

Our minds are like steel traps. We focus on the things we feed it – whether that's yellow ties, your billable hours for the week or a pending case.

You *can't* let go.

Well-meaning people give you terrible advice. “*You think too much. Stop over thinking things*” they tell you, which only makes things worse. Their advice is difficult for most.

What's the solution then?

Stop trying to disconnect from work. This approach is doomed to fail.

Instead, replace work with something else.

How?

Strategy #1: Do something you enjoy

Doing activities you enjoy triggers the release of dopamine. The neurotransmitter your brain needs to come up with a creative solution to your problems.

But it also provides a distraction.

There's another wonderful benefit to focusing on activities you enjoy. Your cognitive abilities increase dramatically. Negative emotions like stress and anxiety [decrease cognitive function](#). The more stress you feel, the less capable you are of solving your problem. So...

- Take a bath
- Do some exercise
- Play a game
- Go out to eat with friends
- Travel to a favorite spot
- Watch a movie
- Get some sleep

Need more ideas? Dr. Eric Berg shares some helpful tips on increasing dopamine levels in the brain naturally.

Strategy #2: Do something you dislike

This sounds counterintuitive.

Just a few paragraphs ago I mentioned that stress and anxiety decrease dopamine levels and cognitive function. Now I'm suggesting that you do something you *hate*?

Confusing no?

Here's why it works. It's a counterintuitive way to reframe the problem or issue you're currently struggling with. If you're obsessing over your billable hours for the week, organizing your files will **(a.)** provide you with a distraction **(b.)** reframe your thinking on your billable hours dilemma and **(c.)** provide you with a dopamine boost and a sense of accomplishment.

It's actually a win.

When you organize your files you're using psychological frames to change your thoughts and feelings.

You're also more likely to *increase dopamine levels*. Twice.

1. *After* completing a minor task you hate and...
2. When you go *back* to your original task.

It's a clever way to change your thinking.

Strategy #3: Avoid your co-workers

Don't spend time with your co-workers.

Avoid legal professionals when you're trying to disconnect from work. Spend time with friends and family who are unfamiliar with or disinterested in your work.

Obvious, right?

You'd be surprised at the number of attorneys who spend their free time with other attorneys. They discuss other things besides work, at first. But eventually, the conversation drifts towards work. If you value your sanity this isn't the time or the place.

This comes with the obvious tips.

Shut down your email client, turn off your phone or set it to do not disturb. Physically remove yourself from people, paperwork and projects.

These strategies won't work if...

Your mind is allowed to wander. If you're like most people, you prioritize work. The activities you do – whether you enjoy or dislike them should create focus. You should be absorbed and fully engaged in the task at hand.

Give your mind something to chew on.

Disconnect to do your best work

You take your work home with you.

Your brain wants to obsess. To ruminate on your problems, failures and stressors. Stop trying to disconnect from work. This approach is doomed to fail.

Instead, replace work with something else.

When you need to disconnect from work, temporarily replace work with an activity you enjoy or an activity you hate. Either one works as long as your mind is *fully engaged in the task at hand*.

Finally, avoid your co-workers.

Take the time you need to recharge and you'll find you have an inexhaustible supply of amazing ideas.

[Try Bill4Time for free.](#)