



## The “95% Unplugged” Vacation

Recently, I emailed a woman that I often partner with and received an out of office reply indicating that she was *“on vacation with family and 100% unplugged from all communication devices.”* She was an entrepreneur mom (like me) and we’d often discussed the challenges that working women/entrepreneurs face so her emphatic and somewhat unconventional out of office reply definitely brought a smile to my face. While my first visceral reaction was *“good for her!”*, it was almost immediately followed by a second reaction – *“sounds good in theory, but not for me.”* As someone who prides herself on being the “queen of work/life balance” it seemed odd to me that I had that response, but if I were honest with myself I had to acknowledge that I’m a “95% unplugged during vacation” mom, and that just works best for me.

We hear “work/life balance” all the time, but we tend to think of that concept as only meaning *“how can I pull away from work and spend sufficient time with family, etc?”* What I’ve found though when considering this “to unplug or not dilemma” is that for me, I also have to consider the other side of that balance – creating just enough space for “work” to keep my business running and avoid the mind numbing avalanche of emails awaiting me after a week of not checking emails. Of course, while on vacation my primary purpose and focus is on my family, myself, and having fun (as it should be), but the reality is that clients will continue to approach me with new business opportunities, our tenant may have an emergency, or a friend may have a bad break up and really need to talk. As a result, I’ve found that when I’ve tried to unplug 100% it creates more stress for me and allowing that 5% of check in time relieves that and enables me to really enjoy my time away. For me, that 5% usually looks like checking email for 20-30 minutes every other day – not doing “real work”, and this allows just enough connection with the outside world for me to feel like I’ve got the balance I need.

To be completely honest, I tried to be 100% unplugged for awhile, and it just wasn’t working. Honestly, it felt a bit like I’d imagine a drug withdrawal might feel or the feeling when I realize that I’ve inadvertently left my purse in a restaurant. Furthermoe, I had a bit of a jarring incident during one Destin family vacation. My family was lunching at our favorite restaurant – sipping drinks with umbrellas on the outside patio overlooking the bay when my phone rang. Of course, I looked to see who was calling, and I recognized the caller as a woman whom I’d talked to in the past about possible business, but we’d never worked together. Even though I knew the caller was potential client, it felt completely wrong to answer the call (and I’m sure I would’ve heard many “Crackberry” jokes for the rest of the day from my husband) so I sent it to voicemail and continued with lunch. After we returned to our vacation condo, I listened to the voicemail from a woman (from a large governmental agency) asking me to call her back (with little explanation). I asked my husband if he minded if I returned the call (once he realized that there was potential money involved, he had no problem with me stepping away for just a bit of business ☺). When I called her back, she told me that her group had some funds that they wanted to spend before the close of the fiscal year so they’d decided to conduct some training. My excitement hearing this quickly turned to a feeling of angst as she told me that regrettably, they were calling a list of their preferred training vendors and decided to just go with the first one who picked up (since they needed to submit



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the training request the same day). She spent the next 10 minutes asking me to describe some of my offerings in more detail for “future reference”...I never heard from her again. This experience was pivotal for me as it reaffirmed FOR ME that unplugging 100% isn't always the best option. Ironically, I still didn't regret not picking up the call during lunch because that simply wasn't the time and place. I truly do restrict my “check in” time til later in the evening when the kids are down or while my husband has taken them to the pool because it's important for me to fiercely protect our family leisure time and ensure that vacation is just that.

Revisiting the initial question about whether to unplug completely or not, I definitely think that is an individual choice and as with all of life's most challenging questions, there is no one right answer. My philosophy is likely a function of my specific life circumstances – being self employed, taking fairly frequent family vacations, having two small children, etc. But I think that each of us has to identify their sweet spot between 0-100% , own it, and embrace it.

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