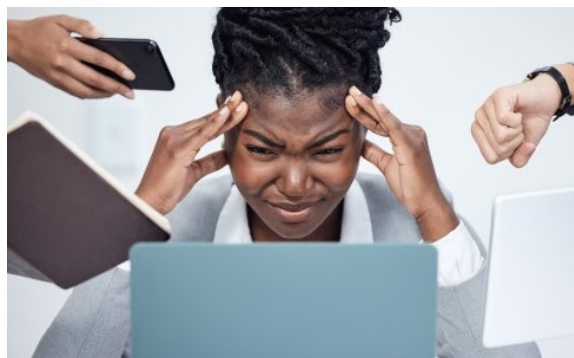


The Post-Holiday Reset: Re-Establishing Communication and Availability Norms

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The weeks following the holidays often bring a familiar feeling: full inboxes, overlapping priorities, and a sudden return to urgency after a brief pause. During the holiday season, many teams naturally loosen expectations around response times and availability. The challenge in January is not simply returning to work, but resetting clear and healthy norms before old habits (or unhealthy ones) take hold again.

In today's hybrid and remote work environments, boundaries around communication are rarely self-correcting. Without intentional reset moments, employees may assume they are expected to remain as available as they were during peak periods, even when that level of responsiveness is no longer necessary or sustainable.

The post-holiday return provides a rare opportunity to recalibrate.

One of the most common sources of confusion is silence. When organizations do not explicitly restate expectations, employees are left to infer them based on behavior. A single late-night email or weekend message can unintentionally signal that immediate responses are once again required. Over time, these small signals shape norms that are difficult to unwind.

Re-establishing healthy expectations starts with clarity. Teams benefit from shared understanding around what constitutes urgent communication versus what can wait. Not every message needs an instant reply, yet modern tools make everything feel immediate. Resetting norms means reinforcing that responsiveness should be purposeful, not constant.

Manager behavior plays an outsized role in this process. Employees tend to mirror what they see, not what they are told. If leaders resume sending messages at all hours or praising rapid responses, boundaries quickly erode. Conversely, when leaders model reasonable response times and respect off-hours, those practices spread organically across teams.

It is also important to acknowledge that flexibility cuts both ways. Many employees value the autonomy to step away during the day or adjust schedules as needed. That flexibility works best when paired with mutual respect for personal time. Resetting expectations is not about reducing productivity; it is about ensuring that availability aligns with actual business needs rather than habit or inertia.

January is also an ideal time to address roles that genuinely require extended availability. Rather than allowing informal expectations to creep back in, organizations should be intentional about when and why off-hours communication is necessary. Clear parameters reduce frustration and help employees understand when responsiveness truly matters.

Healthy communication norms do more than protect work-life balance. They improve focus, reduce burnout, and enhance collaboration. When employees are not operating in a constant state of interruption, the quality of work and decision-making

improves.

As teams settle back into routine after the holidays, the question is not how quickly everyone can return to being “always on.” The better question is: which norms will support sustainable performance throughout the year? A thoughtful reset now can prevent misunderstandings, protect morale, and set a tone that lasts well beyond the first quarter.