

## **“Unplugging” – Necessary for Self-Care**

Have you ever gone away for vacation and ended up doing more work for your job than relaxing for yourself? Technology is constantly advancing and allowing us to do more on smaller and more accessible devices, consequently we have the ability to connect to the office computer from our computer at home. This is great during office hours because it allows us to be away from the office but still be “connected”. The downfall of this convenience is that you are ALWAYS “connected”. Your coworkers, clients and industry partners become used to relying on you to receive their call or email and come to expect you to respond at any time of day even if you are on vacation.

In my personal life as well as in my career I enjoy staying connected. My phone has internet access and at one time, both my personal and work email came directly to it. I always knew what was going on, even when traveling out east on vacation, or as I left civilization for a canoe trip. But the cost of staying connected can become a burden for your emotional and mental health.

I remember a particular instance where I was due to go on a weeklong canoe trip with my teenage daughter. I was anxious about going out of cell phone range “just in case”. “What if there is an emergency at the office?” “What if the volunteers don’t show up?” Of course I had back up people covering all of this, but letting go and trusting that everything will be covered was difficult.

It turned out that there was an emergency, but I had been out of cell phone range for over 24 hours. Once I was in range my cell phone had bells and whistle go off with emails and voice mails set to high priority. I instantly went into work mode in the middle of Smoke Lake – Algonquin Park. My daughter looked at me like I was an alien as I made phone calls and tried to follow up. I became more and more anxious since I could not reach anyone. It dawned on me that I was at least an hour paddle from the shore and another 45 minutes from my car then a six hour drive to the office. We were only half way through our vacation week and just coming out to pick up another member of the trip. When we got to shore my daughter took my phone removed the battery and locked both in separate cars.

She said, “This is our time. Enjoy your vacation in the bush. The office will still be there next week”. And you know what? She was right. Now when I am not at work or on-call I avoid checking my work email and when I am on vacation I focus on my friends and family rather than obsessing over what is happening at the office. It is always “there” when I get back - after I have had a chance to really unwind, relax and take care of myself.

*This article was written by Elizabeth Pease, currently the Volunteer & Community Coordinator for Community Torchlight – Distress Centre for Wellington and Dufferin Counties. She has been a part of the Distress Line movement since 1996.*

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