

# Coach's Corner



## Are You 9-to-5 or 24/7?

by Mary Ellen Bates, Bates Information Services

One of the AIPP membership benefits I value the most is AIPP-L, our always-active members-only discussion list. A recent conversation—started over a weekend, of course—was what we do when we find an interesting article over the weekend that we think a client would like to see. Do we fire off an email right then, or wait until Monday morning?

As is often the case with infopreneurs, there were as many opinions as there were discussion participants. The conversation brought up a number of issues around client focus, client management and work-life balance, including:

- If I send the email on the weekend, it will get lost in all the other mail that arrives after close of business on Friday
- The client will think I am accessible on the weekend, jeopardizing my ability to maintain a healthy boundary between my work and the rest of my life

- If I don't get the note out immediately, I will lose interest with it by the start of the work week and won't send it at all
- If I postpone sending the email, it will stay in my thoughts and interfere with a relaxing weekend

As I thought through these concerns, I realized that my own response to this question has changed dramatically over the years, based on both my client base and my approach to life. When I launched my business, it absorbed all my energy and focus. Sure, my only client was my last employer, but I spent all day in my office building my network, writing articles, lining up local speaking engagements, and volunteering with AIPP. In fact, I'd often wander back to my office after dinner, ostensibly to check email one last time, but I often wouldn't emerge again until hours later, caught up in an email discussion or an interesting article.

Eventually, I realized that my business wasn't benefitting when I was stressed and burned out. I decided to set firm office hours and I turned my computer off at the end of the work day to

make it less enticing during off hours. I would occasionally work on the weekend but would consciously set a cap on how long I would spend in the office. While I would hardly call this a 9-to-5 schedule—it was often more like 7:30am to 6:30pm—I had rediscovered my evenings and weekends.

Fast-forward a decade and a new thought occurred to me. One of the biggest benefits of being self-employed is the ability to decide what kinds of clients to attract and therefore what kinds of hours I need to keep. If I focused on getting clients with short deadlines, who needed to reach me on a moment's notice, or who would tie up all of my available hours for long stretches of time, I would be as tied to my desk as I would have been as someone else's employee. Instead, I focused on finding clients with projects with enough flexibility that I could take time off during the week to handle elder-care responsibilities, volunteer at a local non-profit, or take a hike in the mountains. Sure, that meant that I would be back in the office on the weekends, just like the bad old days when I felt like I never had a life. The difference

is that I have taken a more expansive view of my available time. Instead of having work hours and off hours, I just have weekly hours, which I can spend any way that works for me. Somewhere in those seven days of 24 hours each, I need to fit in 40 or 50 hours of work. The rest of the time is mine to do with as I want, and whether that falls on a weekday or weekend doesn't bother me as much.

If, during my off-hours reading, I see something I'd like to pass along to a client or incorporate into a presentation I'm working on, I will pause to capture my thoughts. I might email myself a pointer to the article with a few sentences about what I thought was notable or with whom I might share it. I keep a few index cards with me wherever I am, in case the easiest way to capture a thought is to just jot it down. And yes, I have even stepped off a treadmill mid-session to text myself an idea sparked by the podcast I was listening to. When I get back to the office and revisit my note, in what-

ever format and medium it took, I have enough clues to repeat my thought process and finish the idea. I don't always have the same sense of ah-ha; the passage of time helps me weed out the inspirations that are not ready for prime time.

Getting back to the discussion on AIP-L about whether to send an email to a client on the weekend, here is how I would address the concerns raised.

- I pause to capture my thoughts as soon as I can in whatever format is most convenient; I don't want to try to hold onto a thought until Monday morning.
- If it takes under five minutes to compose an email to complete the thought, I put myself in work mode and just write it up.
- If I do decide to send an email to a client over the weekend, I delay the delivery until at least mid-morning on Monday, to ensure it isn't lost in the

weekend's incoming email and to mask the fact that I was working on the weekend. Just as I don't brag to my clients that I am taking a work day off for a beekeeping event, I don't highlight the weekends I spend in the office.

- I accept that, when I revisit my inspiration during work hours, I may not feel as excited about it as I did initially, and will decide to just drop the idea. That's OK too.

Do you take a 9-to-5 approach to your work week or are you 24/7? Join the discussion on AIP-L and let me know.



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