Unplugged

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> "Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you."
> – Anne Lamott

When you find yourself traveling at the speed of risk, is it necessary to stay plugged in to organization communications, local and world news feeds, and updates from social media? Staying "on" all the time is risky on many fronts. If you've ever solved a maddening tech glitch by powering down and back up your device, you're familiar with the healing qualities of a reboot. The same goes for your brain! The National Day of Unplugging falls in early March. The NRMC team challenges you to think of ways that you and your nonprofit team members can take this time to go offline and make a fresh reboot.

Staying connected and tuned in gives nonprofit leaders valuable information to make risk-conscious decisions. However, excessive screen time and a barrage of news and information are catalysts for burnout and productivity depletion. Time spent truly away from email and screens gives your body and mind a chance to recharge and renew, which can profoundly affect your motivation and your perspective on the toughest challenges facing your mission.

But how do you unplug when you feel like your mission relies on your ability to stay connected?

Build a habit of unplugging throughout the day. A full day off the grid might sound inconceivable. Start small by committing to short breaks throughout the day – breaks that are fully screen-free. The *New York Times* article "Relax! You'll Be More Productive" reports on the work of Professor K. Anders Ericsson from Florida State University. Professor Ericsson found that high-performing individuals maximized their productivity and performance when they worked in 90-minute intervals. After 90 minutes of uninterrupted work, they unplugged for a break. This interval works best because it mimics a "Basic-Rest Activity Cycle" (BRAC) that everyone experiences while they sleep. By harnessing this powerful cycle during waking hours, you can increase creativity and motivation. Establishing a habit of short, unplugged moments will give you confidence that more extended periods off the grid are achievable and will produce more profound results.

Plan your unplugging. Sound risk management practice often focuses on developing contingency and backup plans. Not only does this practice ensure the sustainability of your organization's programs and services, but it

gives you and your team peace of mind. The same goes for your day of unplugging. To provide yourself with peace of mind and permission to go off the grid, appoint a colleague as a designated point of contact, let others know of your plans to take the day away from screens, and make sure you have a way to be contacted in case of an emergency. Essentially, treat your unplugged day as you would any other vacation day! The comfort and peace of mind that comes with knowing that everything has been left in capable hands will allow you to give in to fully relaxing and unwinding.

After you've unplugged, go all in. As a single, working mom, my time away from NRMC is filled with to-do lists and worry that I'll never finish my schedule of personal tasks in the allotted timeframe. After a stressful day of running errands, housework, and trying to figure out when to fit in that indoor-trainer bike ride, my 4-year-old daughter and my father excitedly came running in with a toboggan and snow gear. "Come on! We're going sledding!!!" they cried. All of my insides tensed up… but what about the rest of my list? What about that bike ride I had planned? What about the schedule?? I don't have TIME for sledding! I begrudgingly pulled on my boots and coat and vowed to go out for just *one* trip down the hill to appease them. 30 minutes later, I found myself giggling and dragging the sled back up the hill for "just one more ride" without a second thought about my list. When we finally came inside, our cheeks pink from the cold, I felt relaxed, joyful, utterly relieved, and surprised. Such a simple activity had an intense effect on my mood and the clarity of my thoughts. It was exactly what I needed!!

I had become immersed in the activity of FUN, and when I was finished, I felt ready to conquer the world! Find something away from screens and *allow* yourself to become *immersed*.

I encourage you to maximize your mission, motivation, and your professional contributions by allowing yourself—and your team—regular opportunities to mindfully renew and refresh.

Unplugged Resources for Nonprofits

"Recharge & Reboot: Coloring Pages for Leaders" from Nonprofit Leadership Center

PODCAST: "How Unplugging from Work Will Boost Your Productivity" from The Intentional Advantage by Tanya Dalton

"What Happens When Teams Fight Burnout Together?" from The Energy Project

Whitney Thomey is Lead Consultant & Risk Ethnologist at the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your thoughts, questions, or fears about unplugging. Whitney would also love to hear your favorite activity that takes you off the grid! Reach out to Whitney at 703.777.3504 or Whitney@nonprofitrisk.org.