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AS BOUNDARIES GET BLURRED DURING WFH...

## Cos Take Steps to Help Staff Strike a Work-Life Balance

Fix office hours, lay down other guidelines to ensure employees get time off from work

Kala Vijayraghavan & Rica Bhattacharyya

Mumbai: The adoption of work from home (WFH) has allowed companies to skirt the Covid-19 threat to offices but, as the practice has dragged on for four months and counting, there's a dark side to it too. The biggest complaint across companies is employees are expected to respond immediately to calls and emails. The assumption that a person is now accessible at all times has led to a lot of conflict and stress. Given that WFH will only intensify, companies are trying to nip such tendencies in the bud. Following feedback and complaints of burnout due to extended work hours, corporate leaders such as Nisha Godrej of Godrej Consumer, Harsh Goenka of RPG, Ahmed El Sheikh of PepsiCo, Bharat Puri of Pidilite and Suresh Narayanan of Nestle, among others, are communicating with staff to ensure that personal time isn't encroached upon and that they can disconnect from work without fear of repercussions.



**80-95%** staff of several large Indian cos and MNCs working from home since April

**WFH has worsened** many pre-existing issues such as substance abuse, OCD and hypochondria, say mental health experts

Health experts said an increasing number feels overwhelmed because of the lack of demarcation — attending to emails, calls and video meetings — despite having household chores to finish or just needing to unplug from work to maintain their sanity. Firms are putting policies in place to ensure that there is a more professional structure to WFH — lunch hours, no calls or meetings that are too early or too late and taking mandatory days off.

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### 'Insensitivity can Cause Stress'

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People can get stressed not just from the uncertainty of the pandemic but also from the insensitive behaviour of supervisors and bosses, said Suresh Narayanan, CEO of Nestle India.

"I try and set personal examples of how I can let my team manage 'work' in WFH and 'home' in WFH," he said.

"We have as a rule mandated that there can be no meetings after 6 pm, no meetings during the lunch hour (1-2 pm) and strictly practise no meetings or official reviews on Saturday and Sunday and public holidays."

Nisaba Godrej, MD of Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL), is speaking to staff dealing with personal challenges, agreeing on working hours and boundaries, factoring in daily breaks without any work intrusion, respecting weekends and non-working days and ensuring that each team member takes a day off at least once a month for personal pursuits. They need to invest in their "whole

selves," beyond just their "work selves," she told ET.

GCPL is using the feedback from conversations with employees to create new ways of working, designed for longer-term functioning from home. These measures are aimed at boosting productivity while helping people strike a balance.

"That's the idea behind most of the changes being put in place."

**FOR A HEALTHY ORGANISATION** Happy, healthy employees make a happy and healthy organisation, said Pidilite CEO Bharat Puri.

"There is a lot of blurring happening between office and personal time and boundaries have to be created," he said. "That is what responsible companies need to do to help employees." Pidilite has drawn up an official time calendar that has to be strictly followed to prevent work schedules eating into personal time, with no calls or emails during the latter.

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