

# It doesn't need an answer tonight

A short book about replying to work messages at all hours  
and training everyone to expect it

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First edition

Written by AI with human guidance. It can  
contain mistakes, which later editions correct.

# Contents

1. Before you start
2. Nine o'clock, the buzz, and the four-minute reply
3. Why the four-minute reply makes sense
4. "A reliable person replies quickly"
5. "It's quicker to deal with it now"
6. "They're expecting an answer tonight"
7. "If I don't reply, it looks like I'm not coping"
8. "The boss sends at ten, so that's the culture"
9. "It's only two minutes"
10. "Someone else will answer first"
11. "Being reachable is the price of flexibility"
12. "I'd rather know than wonder"
13. "I only acknowledged it"
14. What the four-minute reply teaches
15. What it costs you
16. What it costs the people at home
17. What it does to the work
18. The window
19. Say it out loud
20. The phone outside the window
21. The first fortnight

22. The decision

23. The ten o'clock boss, the manager who is you, on call, time zones, the freelancer, night thinking and the family chat

24. When you answered at eleven again

25. Nine o'clock, the buzz, tomorrow

26. Notes

## Before you start

This is a short book and you can read it in two or three sittings. It's about one habit, which is answering work messages outside working hours, in the evening, at the weekend, in bed, not because your job needs you to but because a message arrived and answering is what you do with messages. You've probably noticed that the messages keep arriving at those hours. You may not have connected that with the answering.

I'm going to argue three things. The first is that the fast reply makes sense from the inside. It closes something, it feels reliable, it stops you wondering, and it takes two minutes. The second is that most of what it seems to give you rests on a misreading. There's research showing that the person who sends a non-urgent email in the evening usually expects a slower reply than the person receiving it assumes, and that the harm from evening email comes from the feeling of being expected to watch for it rather than from the minutes spent. And every fast reply you send teaches the sender what to expect next time, so the expectation you resent is one you've been building, one reply at a time. The third is practical. Because you built it, you can take it down. Decide when you reply, say so out loud to the people who need to know, and put the phone where it can't ask you anything outside those hours. Chapters 17 to 21 cover how, and none of it needs your employer's permission.

This book isn't about caring less about your job. It's about the difference between doing the work and being available for it, which are not the same thing and are paid differently.

Three cautions.

If your job has a genuine on-call duty, a rota, a pager, a phone that rings for real emergencies, this book isn't telling you to ignore it. Chapter 22 is about how to keep the emergency route open while closing the ordinary one.

If your employer punishes you for not replying at night, with warnings, lost shifts or a boss who says so, that isn't a habit problem and this book can't fix it. ACAS gives free advice on unreasonable demands and bullying at work, and their pages on work-related stress name too many or conflicting demands as a cause an employer is meant to manage.

And if what happens when the phone buzzes isn't habit but dread, and the dread has been with you most days for weeks, and you're sleeping badly or not at all, the NHS says to see a GP. That's a different problem, and a bigger one than this book.

If your trouble isn't answering work but thinking about it, the meeting replayed on the drive home, the problem turned over at dinner, the earlier book *Leave it at work* is about that. This one is about the reply.

The notes at the back give my sources and their limits. Where I'm giving my own reasoning and not a finding, I'll say so.

## Nine o'clock, the buzz, and the four-minute reply

It's ten past nine. You're on the sofa with the second half of something on, and the phone on the arm of the chair lights up. Not a ring. A buzz, and the top of a message. It's from Priya, about the slide deck for Thursday, and it says "Quick one, do we have the updated numbers for slide 8 or should I use the old ones?" You could leave it. You look at it for a second and you know you could leave it. Then you pick the phone up, because you know the answer and it will take a minute, and you type "Use the new ones, they're in the shared folder, file ending v3", and you put the phone down, and it's fourteen minutes past nine. The programme has moved on without you and you're not quite sure what happened in it.

Or it's Sunday afternoon, and the message says "No rush, but when you get a sec could you look at the draft?" and there's an attachment. No rush. You open it anyway, because you're holding the phone and the attachment is right there. You read it. You send three comments. It's Sunday and you've been at work for twenty minutes, and the message said no rush, and the person who sent it is at a garden centre.

Or it's the one in bed, which is the one you'd least like to describe. You're lying there, the light's off, and the phone is face up on the bedside table, and it lights the ceiling. You could turn it over. You look, because if it's something you'd rather know now than at seven. It's a calendar change. You've seen it now, and you're awake in a slightly different way than you were.

These are invented, but I'd guess yours are close. Some words. **The buzz** is the message arriving outside working hours, whatever noise it makes. **The four-minute reply** is the fast answer you send to it, whether it takes four minutes or forty seconds. **The lesson** is what each four-minute reply teaches the person who sent the message about when to expect you, and chapter 13 is about it. **The class** is everyone you've taught that way over the years, colleagues, boss, clients, and yourself. **The nod** is the reply that only says you've seen it, "got this, will look tomorrow". **The wonder** is the urge to know what's in the inbox. **The window** is the hours in which you reply, which chapter 17 is about. **The line** is the one message that tells people what the window is. And **the other door** is the route you leave open for a real emergency, so that closing the ordinary one is safe.

Before you go on, do one thing. For a week, every time you answer a work message outside your working hours, note the time, who it was from, what it was, and whether it needed an answer before morning. Be honest about the last one. You'll want the list in chapter 5, and I think it'll surprise you.

## Why the four-minute reply makes sense

Nobody answers a work email at ten past nine because they've thought it through and decided that's the best use of the evening. They answer because the phone lit up, they knew the answer, and answering was the shortest route back to the sofa. It's worth being honest about what the four-minute reply gives you, because a habit that gave you nothing wouldn't be a habit.

It gives you closure. A question arrived, and now it hasn't. The open thing is shut, and shutting things is satisfying at a level that has nothing to do with work. It gives you relief from the wonder, because once you've looked you know there's nothing worse in there. It gives you the feeling of being reliable, the sort of person who's on it, whose colleagues never wait. It gives you a small head start on tomorrow, one less thing in the morning. And it gives you a sense of control, because a message you've answered can't ambush you, and the evening feels safer with the inbox watched.

Underneath those there's usually a set of beliefs, and they're the chapters that follow. That a reliable person replies quickly. That it's quicker to deal with it now than have it hanging. That the sender is waiting for an answer tonight. That not answering looks like not coping. That the boss sends at ten, so that's the culture. That it's only two minutes. That if you don't reply someone else will and get the credit. That being reachable is the price of the flexibility you've been given. That you'd rather know than wonder. And that a nod doesn't count. Each of those has something true in it, and each is doing the same job, which is making the four-minute reply look like the only sensible response to the buzz.

The buzz is real and the question in it is usually real. This book isn't going to tell you the message didn't matter. It's going to look at whether it mattered tonight, which is a different question, and at what your answer teaches the person who sent it. Then it'll look at what the habit costs, which is more than minutes and isn't mainly about you. And then it'll give you a way to decide when you reply, so that the phone stops being the thing in the room that decides your evening.

## **"A reliable person replies quickly"**

You reply fast because that's what reliable looks like. People know they can count on you. If someone needs something, they don't have to wait until morning and wonder whether you saw it. That reputation took years to build, and every fast reply is a small deposit in it.

Look at what the reputation is actually for. Reliability is doing what you said you'd do, by when you said you'd do it. It isn't doing everything the moment it's asked. A colleague who always delivers on Thursday when they said Thursday is reliable. A colleague who answers at ten at night and then misses Thursday isn't. Speed and reliability get run together because speed is easy to see and reliability takes weeks to show, and in the moment the buzz arrives, speed is the only one on offer.

There's research on the gap between what receivers think is expected and what senders actually expect. Laura Giurge and Vanessa Bohns ran eight pre-registered studies with just over four thousand participants, looking at non-urgent work emails sent outside normal working hours. They found what they call the email urgency bias. People receiving such an email assumed the sender wanted a faster reply than the sender, asked separately, actually did. The receivers were putting themselves under a pressure the senders hadn't applied. And the bias wasn't harmless. In their first study, with public sector employees, the people who overestimated what was expected of them reported more stress and lower wellbeing.

So the fast reply isn't the deposit you think it is. The sender wasn't checking the clock. When Priya's message arrives at ten past nine, she's already decided she'll use the old numbers if she doesn't hear back, and she'll be mildly surprised to get an answer, and mildly pleased, and she'll adjust. What she adjusts is her sense of when you're available, which is chapter 13. What she doesn't adjust is her sense of whether you're reliable, because that was never in question at ten past nine.

There's an honest objection. Some senders do expect a fast reply, and some workplaces do run on it. Chapter 9 takes that on. For now, notice that you've never asked. You've assumed the expectation and met it, and the assuming is the part the research is about.

The practical implication is a question. The next time a buzz arrives, before you answer, ask what you said you'd do and when. If the answer is "the deck by Thursday", the deck by Thursday is the reliable thing, and ten past nine has nothing to do with it.

## **"It's quicker to deal with it now"**

Answer it now and it's gone. Leave it and it sits there all evening and you deal with it in the morning anyway, with the extra cost of having carried it. Now is cheaper.

Look at what happens after the reply. You answer Priya about the numbers. Priya, who's also on her sofa, reads the answer and thinks of the next question, because she's now in the deck, and the next question arrives at twenty-five past nine. You answer that. By ten you've had four exchanges about a deck that's due on Thursday, and Priya has too, and both of you have spent an evening on it that neither of you planned. A reply is an invitation to reply. It's the one thing you can do to make sure there's a second message tonight. The earlier book *The work* will still be there made the same point about the evening email session, that emptying an inbox mostly refills it.

Then look at what "gone" means. The question is gone. The subject isn't. You've now got the deck in your head, and the version numbers, and a faint sense of whether Priya sounded worried, and all of that is in the room with you for the rest of the evening. What you carried by not answering was one unread message. What you carry by answering is the work.

Liuba Belkin, William Becker and Samantha Conroy surveyed 570 working adults about email outside working hours and found something that bears on the "quicker" claim. What predicted people's exhaustion and their trouble switching off from work wasn't how long they spent on email after hours. It was whether

they felt expected to monitor it. The time, they write, was not the main driver. If the cost of the evening email were the minutes, then the four-minute reply would be a good deal, four minutes and done. The cost isn't the minutes. It's the state of being on watch, and the reply confirms the watch.

There's a fair objection, which is that some things are quicker now. If Priya's question needs a fact you'll have forgotten by morning, that's a reason to send a one-line note to yourself, not to Priya. If it's a real emergency, that's chapter 22. For the ordinary question, the morning version takes the same four minutes and doesn't come with an evening attached.

So the arithmetic goes the other way. Now costs four minutes plus the reply to the reply plus the deck in your head until bed. Tomorrow costs four minutes. The word "quicker" is doing a job, and the job is making the evening feel like the efficient choice.

## **"They're expecting an answer tonight"**

The message arrived tonight. Whoever sent it is sitting there, waiting, and every hour you don't answer is an hour they're wondering where you are. Leaving it isn't neutral. It's leaving someone hanging.

Go back to the list from chapter 1. Look at the column that says whether it needed an answer before morning. If your week was like most people's, that column is mostly no. The calendar change didn't. The draft that said no rush didn't. The numbers for slide 8 didn't, because Priya had a fallback and told you so. What you've got is a list of messages that could have waited, answered as though they couldn't. That gap is the belief.

Giurge and Bohns' studies are about exactly this gap. They took the same non-urgent evening email and asked one group to imagine sending it and another to imagine receiving it, then asked both how fast a reply was expected. Receivers consistently thought a faster reply was wanted than senders said they wanted. The bias held on weekends and in the evening. It held for emails that were plainly marked as not urgent. And in one of their studies it was larger outside working hours than within them, which is the wrong way round if you think about it. The email that arrives at nine at night, the one least likely to need an answer, is the one you most feel you must answer.

The Sunday "no rush" is the clearest case. The sender wrote "no rush" and meant it. They said it out loud so that you wouldn't do what you then did. You read past it, because "no rush" arrives in

the same buzz as everything else and your hands were already moving. It's worth sitting with that. A person told you not to hurry, and you hurried, and if you'd asked them on Monday whether they'd wanted comments on Sunday they'd have said no, and possibly sorry.

The objection is that you don't know which messages are the urgent ones until you look. That's true, and chapter 19 is about the other door, the route that stays open for the things that can't wait. Once that exists, everything that comes through the ordinary route is, by definition, ordinary.

For now, one thing. Next time a buzz comes, before you answer, ask whether the sender would be surprised to hear from you tonight. If they'd be surprised, they weren't waiting.

## **"If I don't reply, it looks like I'm not coping"**

Silence has a sound. If a message goes unanswered until morning, it says something, and what you're afraid it says is that you've dropped the ball, that you're behind, that you're not on top of things the way you used to be. The fast reply keeps that story from starting.

Look at what the fast reply actually says. It doesn't say you're competent. Competence is in the deck on Thursday. It says you're there. A reply at ten past nine tells Priya one fact, which is that at ten past nine you are reading and answering work messages. That's a fact about your availability, not about your ability, and the two get confused because availability is visible tonight and ability shows up next week.

The confusion goes deeper than one message. Melissa Mazmanian, Wanda Orlikowski and JoAnne Yates studied professionals who used mobile email devices for work, and they describe something they call the autonomy paradox. The people they studied chose to check and answer email everywhere, and saw it as freedom, as control over their own time. But each person's constant availability raised what everyone else expected, and the collective effect was a norm of continual connection that nobody had voted for and everyone was maintaining. The norm was made of individual fast replies, each of which felt like a free choice. The people who most resented being always reachable were the ones keeping the standard up.

That's what "not coping" is really about. It isn't that a slow reply would show you can't cope. It's that in a group where everyone replies fast, a slow reply stands out, and standing out feels like failing. But the group's speed isn't a law. It's a habit that the group is teaching itself, and you're one of the teachers.

The fair objection is that some managers do read silence as a problem. Chapter 22 takes the manager who genuinely expects the ten o'clock answer. For the ordinary manager, though, ask what they'd say if you asked them directly whether you're expected to answer at night. Most would say no, and mean it, and be slightly puzzled you asked. Chapter 18 is about asking.

So the practical point is this. The thing you're protecting with the fast reply is a reputation for being reachable. That reputation is worth having only if you want to be reachable, and the whole of this book is a question about whether you do.

## **"The boss sends at ten, so that's the culture"**

Your manager sends emails at ten at night. Sometimes half past. That tells you what's expected, doesn't it. If the person above you works at that hour, the culture is that hour, and the fast reply is just reading the room.

The room does matter. Daantje Derks and colleagues followed a hundred employees over four working days and found that on days when people used their smartphones more for work in the evening, they reported more interference between work and home, and that the link was stronger where colleagues and supervisors were seen to expect availability after hours. The authors' advice was aimed at managers. Be clear about what you expect, and remember that the emails you send in the evening have recipients. So the norm is real, and a manager who sends at ten does shape it.

But sending isn't expecting. Your manager sends at ten because ten is when she clears her inbox, or because she has children and ten is the first quiet hour, or because she's on a train. None of those is a statement about when you should reply. If you asked her, she might well say she'd rather you didn't answer, because then she feels she has to answer back, and now two people are working at ten. The message at ten tells you when she writes. You've read it as an instruction about when you read.

There's a version of this belief that's harder to argue with. You've never asked, and asking feels like admitting you'd rather not be there at ten, which feels like the wrong thing to admit. So the

culture is inferred from the timestamps and never checked. That's the most common way a workplace ends up with an expectation nobody holds. Everyone reads the timestamps and replies to them, and the timestamps multiply.

The fair objection is that in some places the boss does expect it, and says so. Chapter 22 takes that case. It's rarer than it feels, and the way to find out is one conversation, which chapter 18 sets out.

The practical implication is that a manager's sending time is information about the manager, not about you. What she expects of you is a fact you can get by asking, and until you've asked, you're guessing in the direction that costs you most.

## **"It's only two minutes"**

The reply takes two minutes. Two minutes out of an evening of three or four hours is nothing. Even ten replies is twenty minutes, and you'd spend longer than that looking at the phone anyway.

The two minutes are real. It's the accounting that's wrong, because the cost isn't in the reply. William Becker and colleagues ran three studies on what they call organisational expectations for email monitoring, the sense that you're meant to be keeping an eye on work messages in your own time. In the first, 108 working adults reported their experiences several times a day. In the second, 138 employees and their partners were surveyed as pairs. In the third, 162 adults answered twice, weeks apart. Across all three, the expectation of monitoring produced anxiety, and the anxiety was linked to worse health and more conflict at home. Their explanation is attention. When you're meant to be watching for messages, part of your attention is on the phone all evening, whether or not a message comes. The cost isn't the two minutes of replying. It's the three hours of half-watching.

Ruben Cambier and colleagues found a related thing in 849 nurses in Belgian hospitals. Nurses who felt pressure to answer personal messages quickly made more slips at work, but only when they kept the phone in their pocket. With the phone put away, the pressure didn't translate into errors. The phone's presence was what turned the feeling into the cost. That's a study of the workday rather than the evening, and of personal messages rather than

work ones, and the extension to your sofa is mine. But the shape is the same. A phone that might ask something of you is doing something to you before it asks.

So the two minutes are the visible part. The invisible part is the evening spent in a state where the phone could light up at any moment and you'd answer. That state is what Belkin's study in chapter 4 found tiring, and what Becker's studies found anxious, and neither of them was measuring the minutes.

The objection is that you'd have the phone with you anyway. You might. But a phone that's for the second half of the programme and a phone that's for the second half of the programme and work are different phones, even if they're the same object. Chapter 19 is about the difference.

The practical point is that you can't make the reply cheap by making it fast. The reply is cheap. The watch is what you're paying for.

## **"Someone else will answer first"**

If you don't reply tonight, somebody else on the thread will, and they'll get the credit for being on it. Over time the fast repliers get noticed and the slow ones don't, and you can't afford to be a slow one.

I'll concede something here that the other chapters don't need to. Some workplaces do reward speed. Giurge and Bohns open their paper with the observation that workplaces increasingly use response speed as a proxy for hard work, and a proxy is a real thing, even when it measures the wrong thing. If your manager keeps a mental list of who answered the Sunday email, then answering the Sunday email has a value in that workplace, and pretending otherwise would be dishonest.

Now look at what "credit" comes to over a year. The person who answered at ten on a Sunday gets a flicker of notice. The person who delivered the deck on Thursday and it was good gets the project. Speed is noticed in the moment and forgotten by Wednesday. Work is noticed at review time. If you've got a fixed amount of attention to spend on being noticed, spending it on the reply is spending it on the thing with the shortest shelf life.

Then look at the race itself. If someone else answers first, what have they won. They've told the thread they're available at ten. They've taught the sender to send at ten. They've signed up for the next one. You can let them have that. The thing you've lost, in the version where they answer and you don't, is a reply nobody will

remember. The thing you've gained is an evening, and a sender who has learned that you answer in the morning, which is chapter 13.

There's a harder version of this worry, and it's about early career. If you're new, or junior, or in a job where the next contract depends on being seen, the pressure is real and the cost of a reputation for slowness is real. My answer is still the same, but I'd hold it more lightly. Be reliably fast within a window that's generous, say seven in the morning to seven at night, and be reliably absent outside it. That's a person who's on it, not a person who's on it at eleven.

The practical question is what you'd want to be known for in eighteen months. Nobody is known for their reply times. They're known for their work, and the work is done in the day, which is where the reply belongs too.

## **"Being reachable is the price of flexibility"**

You get to leave at four for the school run. You get to work from home on Fridays. You get to take a long lunch when the sun's out. In return, you're reachable. That's the deal, and it's a fair one, and answering at nine is your side of it.

It's worth asking who you made the deal with. Nobody wrote it down. Your manager didn't say "you can leave at four if you answer at nine". You inferred the second half from the first, and you've been paying a bill nobody sent. Mazmanian and her colleagues, in the study from chapter 6, describe exactly this trade as the professionals they studied experienced it. Mobile email gave them flexibility and peace of mind in the short term, and in the longer term it raised everyone's expectations of everyone's availability, so that the flexibility to work anywhere became the obligation to work everywhere. They chose it as freedom and ended up with less.

Then look at which way the flexibility runs. Leaving at four is flexibility for you. Answering at nine is flexibility for the sender, who gets to ask a question whenever it occurs to them and have it answered. Those aren't the same kind of thing. The first is a fixed, bounded, occasional adjustment. The second is an open-ended availability. You've traded a known thing for an unknown one, and the unknown one is bigger.

The honest objection is that in some jobs it is the deal. If you've been told, in words, that flexible hours come with out-of-hours availability, then it's a term of the job and a different conversation,

and chapter 22 touches it. For most people, the deal was never stated because it was never made.

There's a fairer version of the trade available. If you leave at four for the school run, you might work from eight to nine that evening, on purpose, with a start and a finish, and answer Priya then. That's an hour of work moved, and it's flexibility in the real sense. What it isn't is an evening spent reachable. The difference is whether you decided when, or the buzz did.

The practical implication is that flexibility is something you take in blocks, and availability is something you give in an open tap. Take the blocks. Turn the tap off. Nobody offered you the tap.

## **"I'd rather know than wonder"**

If you don't check, you wonder. What's in there. Was that buzz the thing you've been waiting on. Checking ends the wondering, and the wondering is worse than anything the inbox is likely to hold. So the check is a mercy.

The wonder is real, and there's research that takes it seriously. Martin Pielot and Luz Rello had thirty volunteers turn off all notification alerts for a day and compared it with an ordinary day. People felt less distracted and got more done. But some of them also felt anxious, because they could no longer be as responsive as they believed others expected, and they felt less connected. So the wonder isn't imaginary. Take the buzz away and for some people it gets louder, at least at first.

But look at what the check does to it. You check, and there's nothing, and you're relieved. Twenty minutes later the wonder is back, because the check told you about twenty minutes ago and not about now. You check again. The relief is shorter this time. The check treats the wonder and the treatment wears off, and the more often you take it the less it lasts. The wonder is trained by the checking, in the same way the sender is trained by the reply. The earlier book *The phone can wait* is about this pull in general, and I won't repeat it, except to say that the work inbox is the pull with a justification attached.

Nicholas Fitz and colleagues tried a middle path in a field experiment with 237 people. Some got notifications as usual, some got none, and some got them delivered in batches three times a

day. The batched group felt more attentive, in a better mood, less stressed and more in control of their phones. The group with no notifications at all got fewer of those benefits and reported more anxiety and more fear of missing out. So the answer to the wonder isn't never knowing. It's knowing at times you chose. The wonder settles when it learns there's a next time, and gets worse when it's told there's no time at all.

The objection is that the thing you're waiting on might be in there. It might. If it's a real emergency, the other door in chapter 19 will bring it to you. If it's not, it will be there at the next time you chose, and the sender will have got a reply at the time you said.

The practical point is that the check doesn't end the wonder. A known next check does.

## **"I only acknowledged it"**

You didn't answer. You just sent "Seen, will look at this tomorrow" so they'd know it hadn't vanished. That's not working. That's manners. It takes ten seconds and it stops them wondering.

Look at what the nod says. It says that at ten past nine you read the message, understood it, and typed a reply. Everything Priya learns from a full answer, she learns from the nod. You were there. You were reading. You could be reached. The content of the message was "tomorrow", but the fact of the message was "tonight", and the fact is what teaches.

Then look at what it does for you. You've now opened the message, which means you know what's in it, which means the deck is in the room for the evening, exactly as chapter 4 described. The nod is meant to let you put the message down, and instead you've picked it up, looked at it, and told someone you'll be thinking about it, which you now are. It also invites the reply to the nod, "great, thanks, no rush", which is another buzz, and a small warm feeling, and one more lesson.

Now, the nod has a good version, and I don't want to lose it. If the window in chapter 17 is in place, and you've said it out loud as in chapter 18, then "will look tomorrow" is already known, and the nod is redundant. If the window isn't in place yet, the nod is a step towards it, and better than the full reply, because at least the content says tomorrow. So the nod is a stage, not a destination. It's what you send in the fortnight between deciding and being believed.

The honest objection is about the sender's feelings. Won't they think it's rude to get nothing until morning. Giurge and Bohns' receivers thought so, and the senders in the same studies mostly didn't. The sender who wrote "no rush" was telling you that silence until morning was fine. The sender who didn't write it was, on the evidence, usually thinking the same thing and not saying it.

The practical point is that a nod at nine and an answer at nine teach the same class. If you're going to send anything, send it at the time you want to be known for.

## What the four-minute reply teaches

Everything so far has been about what the reply gives you and what it costs. This chapter is about what it does to the person who receives it, because that's where the habit lives, and it lives longer than the evening.

Think about it from Priya's side. She sent a question at nine, half expecting to use the old numbers. She got an answer at fourteen minutes past. She didn't consciously note it, but something in her updated. Next Tuesday, at nine, with a different question, she'll send it a little more readily, because last time it worked. The Tuesday after, she'll send one she'd otherwise have saved for the morning. She isn't being pushy. She's been taught, by you, that nine is a time you answer, and she's acting on what she learned. That's the lesson. Every fast reply is one.

Now multiply it. Your manager has learned it. The three people on the project have learned it. The client has learned it. And you've learned it too, because every reply confirmed to you that the evening is a time you work, and the wonder in chapter 11 grew on that. That's the class. It's everyone who now expects you at nine because you were there at nine, and it was built one four-minute reply at a time, over years, without a single decision.

A dog learns that the doorbell means someone's coming, and barks at it, and keeps barking at it long after the person's inside. Nobody taught the dog on purpose. The doorbell and the arrival simply came together often enough. Your reply and the sender's message came together often enough too.

I want to be careful about what's evidence here and what's my reasoning. No study I've found has measured whether replying faster causes other people to send more out-of-hours messages. What's measured is the receiver's misjudgement of expectations, in Giurge and Bohns, and the way individual availability raises collective norms, in Mazmanian. The link between those, the idea that your reply is the thing that teaches, is my interpretation of how expectations form, and I think it's the plainest reading of both.

Here's the part that matters. If the expectation was taught, it can be untaught. The people who send at nine because you answered at nine will, if you start answering at eight in the morning, send at eight in the morning within a few weeks, because they'll have learned that too. The earlier book *The Work* will still be there made this point about a manager's email, that expectations follow behaviour and follow it quite fast. Nobody has to be told off. Nobody has to be told anything, though chapter 18 argues that telling them makes it faster and kinder. They just need a few weeks of the new lesson.

So the four-minute reply isn't a response to an expectation. It's the source of one. That turns the whole thing round. You're not keeping up with what people want. You're deciding what people want, and you've been deciding it in favour of your own evenings being available, and you can decide otherwise from tomorrow.

## What it costs you

The cost you've been counting is minutes, and chapter 8 argued the minutes are the wrong unit. This chapter is about the right ones.

The first is the state Larissa Barber and Alecia Santuzzi call workplace telepressure, a preoccupation with messages and an urge to answer them quickly. They built a scale to measure it and found that people who scored high on it reported more burnout, both physical and mental, more days off sick, worse sleep, and more email answering, and that this held after accounting for how involved people were in their jobs and how demanding the technology was. Telepressure isn't the same as being busy. It's a particular relationship with the inbox, and it's the one the four-minute reply builds. In a later pair of surveys with 254 and then 409 employees, Barber and colleagues found that telepressure went with lower satisfaction with the balance between work and life, and that a large part of the link ran through people's inability to detach from work and their loss of control over their own free time.

The second cost is sleep. The phone that lights the ceiling at eleven is a work event happening in bed. The NHS lists sleeping too much or too little, constant worrying and being irritable among the signs of stress, and says to see a GP if you're struggling to cope. Evening messages aren't the only reason for bad sleep, but they're one you can remove by yourself. The earlier books *Nothing gets solved at three in the morning* and *The work will still be there* both take the hour before bed seriously, and the work email is one of the things they'd keep out of it.

The third is anger, which surprised me. Marcus Butts, William Becker and Wendy Boswell had 341 working adults report on work messages received in their own time over a week. Messages with a negative tone made people angry, which you'd expect. But so did messages that simply required time, regardless of tone. A perfectly polite request that needed twenty minutes on a Sunday produced anger, and the anger was what carried through to conflict between work and home. The four-minute reply is sent to keep the peace, and the message it answers has already cost some.

The fourth is the wonder itself, which chapter 11 argued grows with feeding. An evening with a watched inbox is an evening with part of you posted at the door. That's not a cost that shows in any single evening. It shows in the fact that you can't remember the last one you had entirely to yourself.

I'd add one honest limit. All of these are associations from surveys, and people who feel telepressure may differ from people who don't in ways the surveys can't see. But the direction is consistent across every study I've found, and none found the fast reply doing anyone any good.

## What it costs the people at home

The four-minute reply is quiet. You're still on the sofa. The programme's still on. Nobody at home is being asked to do anything. It feels like a private habit with private costs.

Becker's second study, from chapter 8, is the reason it isn't. In 138 pairs of employees and their partners, the expectation of monitoring email out of hours didn't only make the employee anxious. It crossed over. Partners of people under that expectation reported worse health and lower satisfaction with the relationship. The partner wasn't receiving any messages. They were living with someone who was, and the living with was enough.

Look at what the partner sees. A person who's here and not here. A conversation that pauses for the phone and resumes a beat late. A face that changes when the screen lights up, in a way the earlier book *Look up* described for the phone at the table, and the description holds for the sofa. A Sunday afternoon where "no rush" turned into twenty minutes of comments while the other person waited to go out. None of it is a row. All of it is a message, and the message is that the inbox has a place in the evening that the partner doesn't.

Butts and colleagues' study of anger found the same thing from the other direction. The messages that made people angry were the ones that pushed into non-work time, and the anger was what predicted conflict between work and home. The reply is sent to make the message go away. What's left in the room is the mood the

message made, and the mood is what the family gets. The earlier book *Leave it at work* is about the job in your head at home. The reply is the job in your hand, and it's the more visible of the two.

Children get a version of this too, and it's worse for being wordless. A child who's talking about their day to a parent whose phone just buzzed learns something about what competes with them, and how it does, and I'd rather not write the lesson out.

The fair objection is that your partner might do it too, and the house has two phones lighting two ceilings. Chapter 22 takes that. It doesn't change the cost. It doubles it.

The practical point is that the four-minute reply has an audience, and the audience isn't the sender. It's the person on the other end of the sofa, who learns from it exactly what Priya learns, which is where you are at nine.

## What it does to the work

The one thing the four-minute reply is supposed to be good for is the work. Even if it costs you the evening, at least the job is better served. This chapter is about whether it is.

Start with what a reply written at ten past nine is like. You're at the end of a day. You're half watching something. You've got the question on a small screen, without the folder open, without the context. The reply is short, because it's on a phone, and it's slightly wrong, because you're not looking at the file, and in the morning there's a second reply correcting the first. Sandra Ohly and Alessa Latour surveyed 1,714 working people about work-related phone use in the evening and found it went with lower positive mood, and that what mattered most was why people did it. Those who used the phone in the evening because they chose to, for their own reasons, recovered better. Those who did it because they felt they had to felt worse. The four-minute reply is almost always the second kind. Nobody feels they chose to answer Priya. They felt the buzz.

Then look at what the reply does to the next day. Gloria Mark, Stephen Volda and Armand Cardello cut off email for thirteen office workers for five working days and measured what changed. Without email, people switched between windows less, stayed on each task longer, and had lower stress as measured by heart rate monitors. Thirteen people is a small study and the office had agreed to the experiment, so the finding is a demonstration, not a rule. But it points the way you'd expect. Email fragments attention,

and the evening reply extends the fragmentation into hours that were meant to be whole. The work you do tomorrow is done by a person who never fully stopped.

There's also what the reply does to the thread. A question that would have been one exchange in the morning, with the file open and a clear head, becomes four exchanges at night, with a correction at eight. The sender now has four messages to read instead of one. The fast reply looked like service. It was noise.

The honest objection is that some evening replies are good work. If you've chosen an hour, opened the laptop, and answered properly, that's Ohly's autonomous kind, and it's fine, and it's a block of work rather than an availability. The four-minute reply on the sofa isn't that.

So the work isn't served. It gets a worse answer, later corrected, from someone more tired tomorrow, and it gets a thread nobody needed. The morning reply is the better one, on every measure I can think of.

## The window

Everything up to here has been reasoning. From here it's method, and the method has three parts, the window, the line and the phone. This chapter is the first.

The window is the hours in which you answer work messages. Not the hours you work, which may be longer or differently shaped, but the hours in which a message sent to you gets a reply. It needs to be one set of hours, the same every working day, and it needs an edge. "Roughly office hours" isn't a window. "Eight to six" is.

A shop has opening hours on the door, and nobody stands outside at nine at night feeling let down. They read the sign and come back in the morning. The sign is what makes the closed door polite rather than rude.

Choosing the hours is the easy part, and I'd start with the ones you'd defend to anyone. If you're in an office from nine to half five, the window is nine to half five, or eight to six if you like a margin. If you work flexibly, the window is still fixed even though the work isn't, because the window is a promise to other people and a promise has to be the same each time to be one. If you moved an hour to the evening as chapter 10 suggested, that hour can be in the window, on the days it happens, if you say so. What can't be in the window is "whenever I'm awake".

The window has two edges and both matter, but the evening one is the one this book is about. The evening edge is the time after which the buzz gets no reply until the morning edge. Not a nod. Not a

look. Nothing. Chapter 19 is about how to make that physically true rather than a matter of restraint.

Then there's the weekend, which is simpler. The window is closed. A message that arrives on Saturday is answered on Monday morning, and the sender who wrote "no rush" gets exactly what they asked for.

The fair objection is that this feels rigid, and you're not a rigid person. But the rigidity is what does the work. A window that bends whenever a message looks important is the habit you already have. A window that doesn't bend teaches the class something they can rely on, and the class relies on it within a few weeks. Chapter 22 covers the jobs where the edge has to have a gate in it, on call, time zones, real emergencies, and the gate is the other door, not a softer edge.

The practical step is to write the window down, two times, and put it where you'll see it in the evening. That's all this chapter asks. The next one is about telling people.

## Say it out loud

The window in your head is a resolution. The window said out loud is a fact about you that other people can use. This chapter is about the line, the one message that tells the people who need to know.

The line is short. "From next week I'll be answering messages between eight and six. Anything that lands outside that, I'll pick up first thing. If something's genuinely urgent, ring me." That's three sentences, and it does three things. It states the window. It tells the sender what happens to their message, which is that it's safe and will be answered. And it opens the other door, so nobody has to worry about the emergency.

Who gets the line. Your manager, first, in person or on a call rather than in an email, because it's a conversation and the conversation is the point. Then the people you work with most, the three or four who make up most of your class. Then anyone else as it comes up. Clients get a version in your signature, if you have one, which says the same thing more formally. Priya gets it in the next thread, lightly, "by the way, I'm keeping evenings clear now, so you'll hear from me in the morning".

The manager conversation is the one people dread, and chapter 7 argued that the dread is mostly misplaced. Ask, rather than announce. "I've been answering messages in the evenings and I'd like to stop. Is there anything you actually need from me after six?" Most managers say no. Some say "only if the sky's falling", which is the other door. A few say yes and mean it, and then you know something you didn't, and chapter 22 is for you. The earlier book

You could have said no is about the seconds between a request and an answer, and this conversation is one where you're getting the request stated before you've spent months answering it.

There's a second use of speaking out loud, and it's on your own emails. Giurge and Bohns' last study tested a small change on the sender's side. When the person sending a non-urgent email added a line saying "This is not an urgent matter so you can get to it whenever you can", receivers' overestimate of what was expected shrank. The note works. So put it on your own evening emails, when you have to send one, and on your daytime ones too. You'll be teaching your own class the lesson you want, from the sending side, which is the side that shapes expectations fastest.

The objection is that saying it makes it a thing, and you'd rather just quietly stop. You can. It takes longer, because the class has to work out the new lesson from silence, and some of them will worry in the gap. The line spares them that. It also makes it harder for you to slide, because now someone knows.

The practical step is to write the line, send it to the manager as a request for a conversation, and have the conversation this week.

## The phone outside the window

The window is a decision. The phone is where the decision gets tested at ten past nine, and this chapter is about arranging the phone so the decision doesn't have to be made again every evening.

The principle is that the buzz shouldn't reach you outside the window. Not that you should hear it and resist it, but that it shouldn't arrive. Every phone made in the last several years has a setting that silences notifications on a schedule, and most let you choose which apps are silenced and which people can still get through. Set the schedule to the window's edges. Put the work apps, mail, chat, whatever your workplace uses, in the silenced group. That's the whole of the configuration and it takes ten minutes.

Then the other door. Choose the one route that stays open, and I'd make it a phone call, because a call is harder to send idly and easier to notice. Tell the manager and the two or three people who might genuinely need you that the number rings through after six. Then leave it alone. If it rings at nine, it's the emergency, and you'll deal with it. If it never rings, which is what happens to most people, you've learned how many emergencies there really were.

The other door is what makes the closed window safe rather than reckless. Without it, you're relying on nothing going wrong. With it, you're relying on people using the phone when something does, which they will, because you told them to.

Some people prefer to check the inbox once, at a fixed time, rather than never. Fitz and colleagues' experiment in chapter 11 found that people whose notifications arrived in batches three times a day did better than people who got none, on mood, stress and a sense of control. If you're one of those, put a single look at eight in the evening inside the window, as its last act, and keep the phone silent after. A chosen look at a fixed time is a look you can stop. The point is that the phone doesn't get to choose.

Then there's where the phone sleeps. Not on the bedside table, face up, lighting the ceiling. Derks and Bakker's diary study of employees with work phones found that on evenings when people managed to detach and relax, the phone did less damage, and detaching is easier when the phone is in another room. Charge it in the kitchen. If it's your alarm, buy an alarm. This is the single change most people resist and the one they report the most from.

The objection is that the settings are fiddly and you'll get them wrong and miss something. You might, the first week. The other door catches what matters, and the rest waits, and by the second week the settings are set and you've stopped thinking about them.

The practical step is tonight. Schedule, silenced apps, the other door named, the phone in the kitchen.

## The first fortnight

Here's what I'd expect in the two weeks after the window goes in, so that the things that happen don't look like the method failing.

The first evening, the wonder is loud. The phone is in the kitchen and you know there's something in it, because there's always something in it, and part of you is in the kitchen with it. Pielot and Rello's volunteers, in chapter 11, felt this. Less distracted, more productive, and some of them anxious about not being as responsive as people expected. The anxiety is the class in your own head, the version of you that learned the lesson too. It doesn't mean the window's wrong. It means it's new.

By the fourth or fifth evening, the wonder is quieter, and here's why. You've had four mornings of opening the inbox and finding that nothing in it needed you last night. Four is enough to start believing it. Chapter 5 asked you to keep a week's list, and this fortnight is the same list, running in real time.

Somewhere in the fortnight, one thing happens. A message arrives at seven in the evening and you don't see it until eight the next morning, and there's a small consequence. Someone had to wait. Someone used the old numbers. It feels like proof that the window was a mistake. Look at it closely. It was a small consequence, and the person it happened to had a fallback, and used it, and the world went on. That's the evidence you needed. The consequence you were spending every evening to avoid turned out to be this size.

Somewhere else in the fortnight, the other door doesn't ring. It doesn't ring all fortnight. Sit with that too.

The class adjusts faster than you'd think. By the second week, Priya sends the slide 8 question at half past eight in the morning, because that's when she's learned it gets answered. Your manager, if you had the conversation, has stopped copying you in on the ten o'clock ones, or hasn't and doesn't expect anything. The thread that used to have four exchanges at night has one in the morning. Nobody says anything about it, because from the class's side nothing dramatic happened. A shop changed its hours and put up a sign.

What I'd not expect is for the wonder to vanish. It gets quieter and it stays quiet as long as the window holds. Pielot and Rello followed up their volunteers two years later and found that half of those who'd meant to change how they handled notifications were still doing it, which is a better rate than most changes get and a reminder that the other half had drifted. Chapter 23 is about drift.

The practical point is to treat the fortnight as an experiment with a known result. You already know what the inbox looks like in the morning. The fortnight is just where you find out that the evening version was the same inbox, watched.

## The decision

Everything so far has been the reasoning. This chapter is the decision, and I'd rather it were one sentence you can keep than a programme you'll abandon.

The rule is this. I answer work messages inside the window, I've said what the window is, and the phone can't ask me anything outside it. The first part is chapter 17. The second is chapter 18. The third is chapter 19. That's the whole method, and once it's set up it takes no time at all, because its whole point is time you don't spend.

I'd write the rule down and keep it near where the phone charges. Then make three plans in a form that's been tested more than most things in this book. Peter Gollwitzer and Paschal Sheeran pooled 94 studies of what they call implementation intentions, plans of the form "when this, then that", and found that people who make them are considerably more likely to follow through than people who merely intend. The form matters because it names the moment, and the moment is where habits are decided.

**When it's six o'clock and I'm about to leave, then I look at the inbox once, deal with what's urgent, and put the phone on its schedule.** The last look is inside the window. It's the shop turning the sign round.

**When I notice I'm wondering what's in the inbox, then I say "it's in the kitchen, and the other door's open" and go back to what I was doing.** The wonder needs an answer, and this is the answer.

It's true, and it's short, and it doesn't involve going to the kitchen.

**When a message reaches me anyway, through a channel I forgot to silence or a look I didn't mean to take, then I don't reply and I don't nod, and I answer it at the morning edge.** The reply is the lesson. Not sending it is the only way to teach the other one.

What to expect, and I want to be plain that this is my expectation and not a finding. Phillippa Lally and colleagues followed 96 volunteers forming a new daily habit and found that it became automatic over weeks and sometimes months, with wide variation between people, and that missing a single day didn't much affect the process. The window is a habit of not doing something, which is harder to feel forming, and I'd expect the first fortnight to be the loud part and the second month to be when you stop noticing the phone is in the kitchen.

The rule hasn't been tested as a package, and I can't tell you that the messages will stop or that your manager will be pleased. What I can tell you is that the evidence in this book runs one way. The sender expects less than you think. The harm is in the watching, not the minutes. And the expectation is one you taught, which means it's one you can teach differently, starting with the next buzz you don't answer.

## **The ten o'clock boss, the manager who is you, on call, time zones, the freelancer, night thinking and the family chat**

Most readers can stop at chapter 21. This one is for the situations where the window needs a gate, or where the class is harder to teach.

**The boss who sends at ten and says "no need to reply".** Take her at her word. She's told you the window is fine. If she sends at ten and does expect a reply, and says so, then chapter 7's guess has been checked and the answer was yes. Ask what specifically she needs after six, because "everything" is rarely true, and most of the time it comes down to one kind of thing, which becomes the other door. If it really is everything, and it's enforced with consequences, that's a job with an on-call duty that isn't paid as one, and ACAS is the place to ask what's reasonable. This book can't teach a class that's decided not to learn.

**The manager who is you.** If you're the one sending at ten, you're the one teaching. Everything in chapter 13 runs downhill from you faster than from anyone. Derks' study found that supervisors' expectations were what turned evening phone use into interference for the people under them. So write the emails at ten if that's when you write them, and schedule them to send at eight in the morning, which every mail program can do. Put the note from chapter 18 on anything you can't hold. And say the window out loud to your team, on their behalf, because they're less able to say it to you.

**On call.** If your job has a rota, the rota is the other door and it's already built. The window applies to everything that isn't the rota. What tends to go wrong is that the on-call channel and the ordinary channel are the same inbox, so that being on call for emergencies means being on call for everything. Separate them. The pager, the on-call phone, the emergency thread, whatever it is, stays on. Ordinary mail goes on the schedule. When you're not on the rota, you're not on the rota, and that includes the ordinary channel.

**Time zones.** If half your team is eight hours behind, their afternoon is your evening, and the window can't be nine to six without cutting them off. Move the window, don't widen it. Ten to seven, or eight to five with a fixed hour at nine in the evening on the days they need it. What the window can't be is "whenever they're awake", because then it's the whole day and night. The team abroad learns your hours the way Priya did, and they've got their own window to think about.

**The freelancer whose clients expect it.** Clients are a class you can teach, and the line in chapter 18 is your terms of business. Put the window in your proposals and your signature. The client who insists on evening replies is telling you what the job costs, and you can price it, or decline it. What you can't do is give it away by default and resent it. The earlier book *Your turn to text* is about the friend you keep meaning to reply to. The client is the opposite. The client you reply to too fast.

**Night thinking.** If your best ideas come at eleven, write them at eleven. Just don't send them at eleven. A draft saved, or a message scheduled for the morning, gets the thinking down without

teaching anyone that eleven is a time you're available. The thinking was yours. The sending is the lesson.

**The family chat.** It isn't work, and it works the same way. The chat that expects an answer in minutes, the birthday planning that runs until midnight, the message left on read that becomes a small grievance. Cambier's nurses in chapter 8 were feeling pressure from personal messages, not work ones. The window can apply to any channel that's teaching you to watch it. Say so once, lightly, and answer in the morning. The family adjusts faster than the office.

## **When you answered at eleven again**

It'll happen. A Thursday, a hard week, a message that looked bigger than it was, and you answered it at eleven, in bed, with the phone you'd brought up "just for the alarm". You feel you've undone the fortnight. This chapter is about why you haven't, and what to do the next morning.

One reply isn't the habit back. It's one lesson given to one sender on one night, and a class that's had three weeks of the other lesson doesn't unlearn it from one message. Lally's volunteers, from chapter 21, missed days without much effect on the habit forming. A missed evening is a missed day. The extension is mine, and I think it holds.

What matters is what happens next. The wrong response is to decide the window doesn't work for someone like you, and to be reachable again by Saturday. The right one is smaller. Look at which belief did it. Was it "it's only two minutes"? Was it "they're waiting"? Was it the wonder, and the phone was upstairs because the alarm? Each of those has a chapter, and the chapter is the answer, and the answer is usually the phone. If it was in the kitchen, you wouldn't have seen the message. Put it back in the kitchen.

Then the sender. They've had one lesson in the old direction. Don't send a second. If they reply to your eleven o'clock message at seven the next morning, answer at the morning edge like any other, and

the lesson is corrected within a day. If they reply at eleven the next night, that's the class testing whether the rule held, and the test is passed by not answering, not by explaining.

Don't count. Don't keep a tally of good evenings and bad ones. A window with one crack in it is a window. The class notices the pattern, not the exception, and the pattern is what you do most evenings.

I'll say one thing about the hard week. If the reply at eleven was because the work is genuinely too much, and the too much isn't going away, the window isn't the problem and it isn't the cure. The earlier book *The work will still be there* is about the hours, and *ACAS* is about the demands, and neither is this book.

The practical step is one line. Phone in the kitchen tonight. That's the whole of the recovery.

## Nine o'clock, the buzz, tomorrow

It's ten past nine, a Tuesday, three months on. You're on the sofa with the second half of something on. The phone is in the kitchen, charging, on a schedule that started at six, and you don't know whether anything's in it, and you notice that you don't know, and then the programme takes you back.

At half past eight the next morning, the inbox has Priya's question about slide 8 in it, sent at twenty past eight. She's learned. You answer it with the folder open and the right version number, in one message, and she says thanks, and that's the thread. There's an email from your manager sent at ten last night, because that's when she writes them, and it says "no need to reply", and you don't need to, and you read it at your desk with a coffee, which is how it was meant to be read. There's a Sunday "no rush" from a fortnight ago that you answered on the Monday, and nobody remembers it as anything.

The other door hasn't rung. Not once, in three months. You've stopped waiting for it to.

What's changed isn't the job. The messages come at the same rate, though more of them come in the morning now. What's changed is that the evening is yours from six, and the people you work with know it, and the version of you that was posted at the door every night has been stood down. You're not less reliable. The deck goes out on Thursday. You're less reachable, which was the thing you'd confused it with.

If you've read this far and done nothing yet, do one thing tonight. Not the whole method. Put the phone in the kitchen at six and leave it there. Tomorrow morning, look at what came in and ask which of it needed you last night. That's the argument of this book in one evening, and you'll know by breakfast whether it holds.

## Notes

These notes give the sources behind the claims in each chapter, and say where I'm giving my own interpretation. The book isn't legal or medical advice. If your employer's demands are unreasonable, ACAS gives free advice. If the phone comes with dread rather than habit, your GP is the person to ask. The examples throughout, Priya and the slide deck, the Sunday "no rush", the manager who writes at ten, the client and the family chat, are invented to illustrate and aren't drawn from real people.

Studies were checked on 26 September 2026. Giurge and Bohns 2021 was read in full from an open repository copy. The rest were read as published abstracts. None carried a retraction or correction notice at that date. Where a study is a survey taken at one time, it describes an association and can't show what causes what, and I've tried to say so each time.

**Chapter 1.** No sources. The terms are the book's own.

**Chapter 3.** Giurge and Bohns, "You don't need to answer right away! Receivers overestimate how quickly senders expect responses to non-urgent work emails", *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 167, 2021, pages 114 to 128. Eight pre-registered studies with 4,004 participants in total. The first was among public sector employees in Spain and the rest used online samples. The claim about what reliability is for is mine.

**Chapter 4.** Belkin, Becker and Conroy, "The invisible leash: the impact of organizational expectations for email monitoring after-hours on employee resources, well-being, and turnover intentions", *Group and Organization Management* 45, 2020, pages 709 to 740. 570 working adults, surveyed at separate times. The earlier book referred to is *The work will still be there*. The claim that a reply invites a reply is my observation.

**Chapter 5.** Giurge and Bohns, as above. Their study 5 found the bias larger outside working hours. Their study 3 found that marking an email urgent or not didn't remove the bias.

**Chapter 6.** Mazmanian, Orlikowski and Yates, "The autonomy paradox: the implications of mobile email devices for knowledge professionals", *Organization Science* 24, 2013, pages 1337 to 1357. A qualitative study, which describes what the professionals did and said and can't say how common it is. The claim that the fast reply signals availability rather than competence is mine.

**Chapter 7.** Derks, van Duin, Tims and Bakker, "Smartphone use and work-home interference: the moderating role of social norms and employee work engagement", *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 88, 2015, pages 155 to 177. 100 employees over four working days. The distinction between sending and expecting is mine.

**Chapter 8.** Becker, Belkin, Conroy and Tuskey, "Killing me softly: organizational e-mail monitoring expectations' impact on employee and significant other well-being", *Journal of Management* 47, 2021, pages 1024 to 1052. Three studies, 108 adults by experience sampling, 138 employee and partner pairs, and 162

adults surveyed twice. Cambier, Van Laethem and Vlerick, "Private life telepressure and workplace cognitive failure among hospital nurses: the moderating role of mobile phone presence", Journal of Advanced Nursing 76, 2020. 849 nurses, cross-sectional. The extension from the ward to the sofa is mine.

**Chapter 9.** Giurge and Bohns, as above, for the observation that speed is used as a proxy for effort. The claims about what's remembered at review time are mine.

**Chapter 10.** Mazmanian and colleagues, as above. The distinction between flexibility in blocks and availability as a tap is mine.

**Chapter 11.** Pielot and Rello, "Productive, anxious, lonely: 24 hours without push notifications", MobileHCI 2017. 30 volunteers. Fitz, Kushlev, Jagannathan, Lewis, Paliwal and Ariely, "Batching smartphone notifications can improve well-being", Computers in Human Behavior 101, 2019, pages 84 to 94. 237 participants in a randomised field experiment using the authors' own app. One of the authors, Dan Ariely, has had questions raised about data in unrelated work. This paper isn't affected by any notice and I've used it only for its main comparison. The earlier book referred to is The phone can wait. The claim that checking feeds the wonder is my interpretation.

**Chapter 12.** No research sources. The argument about the nod is mine.

**Chapter 13.** Giurge and Bohns and Mazmanian and colleagues, as above. No study I found tested whether faster replies cause more out-of-hours messages, and the teaching mechanism is my reading

of how expectations form. The earlier book referred to is *The work will still be there*.

**Chapter 14.** Barber and Santuzzi, "Please respond ASAP: workplace telepressure and employee recovery", *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* 20, 2015, pages 172 to 189. Two scale-development studies. Barber, Conlin and Santuzzi, "Workplace telepressure and work-life balance outcomes: the role of work recovery experiences", *Stress and Health* 35, 2019. Two online surveys of 254 and 409 employees. Butts, Becker and Boswell, "Hot buttons and time sinks: the effects of electronic communication during nonwork time on emotions and work-nonwork conflict", *Academy of Management Journal* 58, 2015, pages 763 to 788. 341 working adults over seven days. The NHS page on stress at [nhs.uk](https://www.nhs.uk), read on 26 September 2026. The earlier books referred to are *Nothing gets solved at three in the morning* and *The work will still be there*.

**Chapter 15.** Becker and colleagues and Butts and colleagues, as above. The earlier books referred to are *Look up and Leave it at work*. The remark about children is mine.

**Chapter 16.** Ohly and Latour, "Work-related smartphone use and well-being in the evening: the role of autonomous and controlled motivation", *Journal of Personnel Psychology* 13, 2014, pages 174 to 183. 1,714 working people, cross-sectional. Mark, Volda and Cardello, "A pace not dictated by electrons: an empirical study of work without email", *CHI* 2012, pages 555 to 564. 13 workers in one organisation for five days. The description of the ten o'clock reply is mine.

**Chapter 17.** No research sources. The window is my suggestion.

**Chapter 18.** Giurge and Bohns, as above, study 6, where the note read "This is not an urgent matter so you can get to it whenever you can." The earlier book referred to is You could have said no. The wording of the line is mine.

**Chapter 19.** Fitz and colleagues, as above. Derks and Bakker, "Smartphone use, work-home interference, and burnout: a diary study on the role of recovery", Applied Psychology 63, 2014, pages 411 to 440. 69 employees over five days. No phone setting or product is named because they change.

**Chapter 20.** Pielot and Rello, as above, including their two-year follow-up. What to expect is my expectation.

**Chapter 21.** Gollwitzer and Sheeran, "Implementation intentions and goal achievement: a meta-analysis of effects and processes", Advances in Experimental Social Psychology 38, 2006, pages 69 to 119, for the when-then form. Lally, van Jaarsveld, Potts and Wardle, "How are habits formed: modelling habit formation in the real world", European Journal of Social Psychology 40, 2010, pages 998 to 1009. 96 volunteers, 82 with usable data. The rule hasn't been tested as a package.

**Chapter 22.** Derks and colleagues 2015, as above. Cambier and colleagues, as above. ACAS pages on work-related stress and bullying at [acas.org.uk](http://acas.org.uk), read on 26 September 2026. The earlier book referred to is Your turn to text. No claim is made about the law on out-of-hours contact in the UK or elsewhere, because I couldn't read a current official page stating it.

**Chapter 23.** Lally and colleagues, as above. The extension from a missed day to a missed evening is mine. The earlier book referred to is The work will still be there.

**Looked up and not used.** Kushlev and Dunn's 2015 study in Computers in Human Behavior, "Checking email less frequently reduces stress", is often cited for this subject, but no abstract was available to me from any source and it isn't cited. Dabbish and Kraut's 2006 study of email overload had no available abstract. Perlow and Porter's 2009 Harvard Business Review article on predictable time off describes a consulting firm's experiment and isn't a peer-reviewed study, so it isn't cited. Later telepressure papers by Semaan and colleagues are about measurement and aren't relevant.