

The “Right to Disconnect”: Creating Work-Life Balance for Employees... in France

On January 1, 2017, France enacted a “right to disconnect” law in support of a better work-life balance for its employees. The new legislation enables French employees to switch off after leaving the office, meaning no emails should be sent or responded to after-hours. French companies with more than fifty (50) employees must now create policies that outline the use of work-related technology outside office hours with the aim of avoiding intrusion on the personal time of its employees. By clarifying employee rights in this sphere and establishing boundaries, this legislation will seek to eliminate unpaid overtime and create better work-life balance for French workers.

The health impact of poor work-life balance and high stress are well documented: sick days, mental health issues, burnouts, etc. We all know that long hours can cause long-term damage. The attempt to find a solution that works isn't unique to France – it is part of a global trend of employers seeking to create a work-life balance and flexibility for their employees. One municipality in Sweden is experimenting with 6 hour workdays and Yahoo Japan is considering the move to a 4 day work week while other large corporations are making work from home arrangements easier. American tech companies such as Amazon are also experimenting with flex-time programs and reduced work weeks. Some are finding that this arrangement acts as a great recruitment and retention tool for top talent.

The challenge is finding a balance that maintains the expected level of productivity while also maintaining employee satisfaction. While a full “switching off” policy may not be realistic in every organization, many alternate arrangements are possible. The new law should encourage at least a dialogue surrounding the implicit expectations placed on employees when it comes to doing work and answering emails after hours.

If you have questions about this topic or would like to discuss your organization's flex hours policy or any other labour and employment matter, please feel free to speak with one of our Advisors.