

**Policy & Procedure Manual**

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**RIGHT TO DISCONNECT**

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**POLICY**

OPTIONS NORTHWEST understands that due to work-related pressures, the current landscape of work, or an employee's work environment or location, employees may feel obligated or choose to continue to perform their job duties outside their normal working hours. Work-related pressure and the inability to disconnect from the job can lead to stress and deterioration of mental health and overall well-being. This policy has been established to support employee wellness, minimize excessive sources of stress, and ensure that employees have the right to disconnect from their work outside their regularly scheduled hours.

**PURPOSE**

This policy has been created in compliance with Bill 27, *Working for Workers Act, 2021*.

**PROCEDURE**

An employee's time outside working hours is meant for employees to recharge and spend time as they wish and should not be used to complete work-related tasks; however, there may be a lack of separation between home and work that makes it difficult for employees to truly disconnect. Because work is more accessible, employees may end up continuing to work even after their workday is done. Using personal time to work can make an employee feel as though they are "always on" or obligated to continue working or respond to communication.

Employees who do not fully disconnect from their work at the end of the day may experience stress and other mental health issues. Stress and poor mental health are associated with many of the leading causes of disease and disability, can lead to burnout, negatively affect performance, mood, and attendance, and personal and professional relationships.

Employee health and well-being are priorities while working and away from work. OPTIONS NORTHWEST is committed to increasing overall employee health and wellness and providing employees with a better work-life balance.

## **THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT**

Employees have the right to disconnect from their job and any work-related tasks or communication outside of working hours without fear of reprisal.

Employees are encouraged to set clear boundaries between work and their personal lives.

The right to disconnect means that employees:

- Can and should stop performing their job duties and work-related tasks when they are not expected to work;
- Are not required to take work home with them to complete outside of regular working hours;
- Are not expected or required to respond to work-related communication outside their regular working hours, while on break, or during any paid or unpaid time off;
- Should take and use all of their scheduled breaks and time off entitlements for non-work related activities; and
- Will not face repercussion or be penalized for not communicating or continuing to work outside of their regular working hours.

Employees must also be respectful of others' right to disconnect and should not expect their co-workers to respond, communicate, or complete work when not working.

## **WORKLOAD AND PRODUCTIVITY**

OPTIONS NORTHWEST understands that employees may want or need to work outside their normal hours to meet a time-sensitive deadline, to attend to an urgent matter, or due to unforeseen circumstances; however, employees should not regularly or frequently work outside their scheduled hours to complete or catch up on work.

Employees who cannot manage their workload during their regularly scheduled hours should meet with their direct supervisor to evaluate the current workload, priorities, and due dates.

Supervisors will work with employees to come up with a solution to ensure:

- The current workload does not result in the employee working excess hours or contribute to additional stress and burnout;
- Normal job duties can be completed during working hours; and
- Employees can remain productive and meet company goals and objectives.

Working additional hours does not always equate to higher productivity. Employees can maximize their productivity during their workday by using time management tactics, such as:

- Blocking off periods in their schedule and calendar to complete specific tasks or address communication;
- Working with their supervisor to organize work in order of priority or importance;
- Breaking down projects and tasks into manageable chunks;
- Minimizing interruptions by setting their online status to “busy” or “do not disturb;”
- Trying to have at least one dedicated workday per week without meetings (where possible); and
- Setting goals to work continuously for a specified period before taking a break or responding to communication (for example, the [Pomodoro technique](#)).

## **COMMUNICATION**

Employees may feel obligated to send or respond to messages when not working. OPTIONS NORTHWEST may on occasion send general communication to employees when they are not working, such as on an employee's day off or scheduled vacation but will do their best to ensure that they are not sending communication that requires an immediate response from employees. Employees are not expected to respond to any company communication when not at work, with the exception of unforeseen circumstances, such as an emergency.

Employees must also respect others and avoid direct communication like sending e-mails, messages (through their phone or other communication and messaging apps), or calling other employees or people they support outside their regularly scheduled working hours, during breaks, or during an employee's time off, such as their regular day off or vacation time.

OPTIONS NORTHWEST understands that it may be necessary to send communication to a group of employees, such as an entire department, or forward important information to an employee who is not working. If employees do send communications to others who are not at work, they should not expect a response until the other employee returns. If the matter is urgent or an emergency and requires an immediate response, employees must reach out to their supervisor.

Employees who do not reply to work-related communications outside normal working hours will not face negative effects on their employment.

Set communication boundaries by:

- Setting clear expectations for e-mail response time;
- Logging off for the day or setting your online status to “away,” “out of office,” “do not disturb,” or “offline” when not working;
- Scheduling any breaks or time off in your calendar; and
- Avoiding using work e-mail for unrelated communication, such as newsletters, coupons, or personal correspondence.

If employees send communication outside working hours, others are more likely to feel obligated to respond or assume the employee sending the communication will be available during those hours. If it is necessary to compose messages or communication outside regular working hours, use a scheduling tool to send the e-mail at a specified time during work hours, such as the start of the next workday.

### **BREAKS AND TIME OFF**

Breaks are provided in accordance with employment standards and are intended to provide employees with time to recharge and enable them to resume their regular work productively. Employees should take any scheduled or company-provided breaks during their shift. Employees should take time away from their work and refrain from responding or sending communication during breaks.

OPTIONS NORTHWEST understands the importance for its employees to have personal time off. Employees are **required** to use their accrued paid vacation time in full every year for rest, relaxation, and personal pursuits. Employees are expected to complete any time-sensitive projects and meet any deadlines before going on vacation. If work can be attended to when the employee returns, they can resume their duties where they left off before taking vacation. Supervisors will work with employees to delegate job-specific duties that must be completed while the employee is on vacation to maintain workflow and productivity. Employees should not be reluctant to take vacation due to workload, unless there are limitations or restrictions because of a due date, project priority, scheduling conflict, or unforeseen circumstance that prevent an employee from taking a vacation at a specific time requested.

### **OVERTIME**

Hours worked outside an employee’s standard hours may lead to overtime hours. OPTIONS NORTHWEST **allows only bargaining-unit employees** to work overtime. Overtime may be requested or required in certain situations to ensure work is completed; however, employees should not work overtime unless **offered to by the supervisor and agreed to by the employee**. Please see the overtime policy for

guidelines on overtime. Non-Union employees shall continue to collect Lieu Time in the instances where they are required to work approved Overtime.

### **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

OPTIONS NORTHWEST recognizes that the workplace plays a significant role in managing and supporting mental health and understands that deterioration of mental health and wellness can be triggered by excess pressures at work or at home and result in lowered work performance and harm to one's physical and mental condition.

OPTIONS NORTHWEST will support mental health by:

- Minimizing work-related sources of stress;
- Addressing internal factors that contribute to burnout;
- Regularly assessing workload, productivity, and expectations;
- Promoting work-life balance;
- Helping employees recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health issues;
- Having an open-door policy for communication and ensure employees are comfortable talking to their supervisor about mental health concerns;
- Treating mental health with the same level of importance as physical health and safety;
- Conducting risk assessments to identify workplace factors that worsen or improve mental health; and
- Providing employees with the assistance and access to resources they need to support their mental health (such as employee assistance programs, accommodations, and so on).

**RECOMMENDED BY:** Director, Human Resources

**APPENDICES:** 1

**OPERATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY:** Administration, Finance, Human Resources, Community Services (all)

**ORIGINAL POLICY DATE:** July 2022

**AUTHORIZED BY:** Executive Director

**SIGNATURE:**  \_\_\_\_\_



## Right to Disconnect

### Acknowledgement and Agreement

I, (**employee name**), acknowledge that I have read and understand the Right to Disconnect Policy of OPTIONS NORTHWEST. I agree to adhere to this policy and will ensure that employees working under my direction adhere to this policy (if any). I understand that if I violate the rules set forth by this policy, I may face disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

