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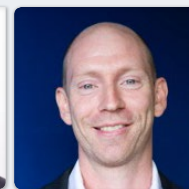
Should pastors be available all the time?

In contrast to the idyllic notion of spending days in quiet contemplation, secluded from interruptions while preparing sermon series months ahead of time, the modern-day pastor operates in a world where days (and nights) more often are spent dealing with the busyness of pastoral duties—visitation, phone calls, meetings, and crisis intervention. New technology, such as social media and email, has created the expectation of being accessible "everywhere, all the time."[1]

Has this perpetual connectivity assisted the pastor in balancing work commitments or just added additional pressure? We surveyed Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church pastors in Australia to understand the impact of work email on their work-life balance.

This article concentrates on our findings.

A biblical balance

Though a number of such studies have been conducted on the impact of email and the general population, to date no one has explored it within the SDA pastoral context. We felt it important to consider this issue in light of the additional expectation for ministers to espouse and model a "healthy" balanced lifestyle. After all, there are clear biblical principles for doing so (see following table).

Text	Action
Genesis 2:3	God completes creation and rests
Exodus 20:8–11	Commandment to rest on Sabbath and do no work
Psalm 46:10	Being still
Mark 1:35; 3:13; 6:31, 32	Jesus seeking a time of solitude
Luke 10:42	Martha being admonished to cease work for a time

Ellen White was concerned with this issue and counseled pastors and other workers to "come out against intemperance of every kind,—intemperance in working, in eating, in drinking and in drugging."[3] She also made it clear that the "labor of the day should not be prolonged into the evening,"[4] and workers are not to "try to crowd into one day the work of two."[5]

Many contemporary writers have written extensively on the issue of work-life balance;[6] a particularly topical subject for researchers and commentators,[7] yet little has been published that explores this issue in the context of the Christian pastor and, in particular, SDA pastors.

Results

In 2014, we surveyed SDA pastors in Australia in order to investigate the impact of work email on their lives and levels of work-life balance. A representative sample of 78 local church pastors completed the survey. An overwhelming majority (89 percent) indicated they own some sort of mobile device (e.g., smartphone, tablet) that allowed them to check their work emails at any time. A surprising 98.7 percent indicated that they check their work emails when not at work. More than one-third (34.6 percent) of participants indicated they check their emails "a few times a day." Almost one out of every four pastors (24.4 percent) checked their emails "once a day" when not at work.

The survey participants were asked at what times of the day, when not at work, they check their work emails. The results were that 23.1 percent access their emails before breakfast, 30.8 percent access emails in the evening, 61.5

percent check at various times of the day, and 20.5 percent of local church pastors acknowledge that they check work-related emails when on vacation.

Why check work emails when not at work?

We explored more deeply why pastors check their work emails when not at work. We found that 34.6 percent indicated they "like to know what is happening"; 35.9 percent said that "it helps me manage things when I go back to work on paid time." Another 10.3 percent "enjoyed being connected to work all the time," and notably, almost one out of four local church pastors (24.4 percent) specified that "work is an important part of who I am."

Is work email an intrusion?

In response to a question asking how participants feel about having their work email available to them all the time, 53.8 percent of pastors indicated that they found it to be "helpful." In fact, 37.2 percent of respondents recognized that having work email available to them all the time made their work more "efficient." Only 16.7 percent identified it as "a distraction," and 7.7 percent found it "tiring." Respondent comments such as, "Both, helpful in work times though intrusive when 'clocked out,' " recognized the need for balance. A number of participants commented that they found it "necessary," and one stated: "Now that emails can be accessed at all hours, employers can tend to forget that there are times when it is 'tools down.' . . . I wish we could 'switch off' and not have the constant intrusion."

To what extent have you seen an increase in work-related emails?

Our study found that 38.5 percent of responding pastors identified that in their time in the workplace they had experienced either a "significant" or "substantial" increase in work-related emails. A further 24.4 percent of respondents noted "somewhat" of an increase.

FIGURE 1. How often work interferes with the ability to develop or maintain connections and friendships in your community.
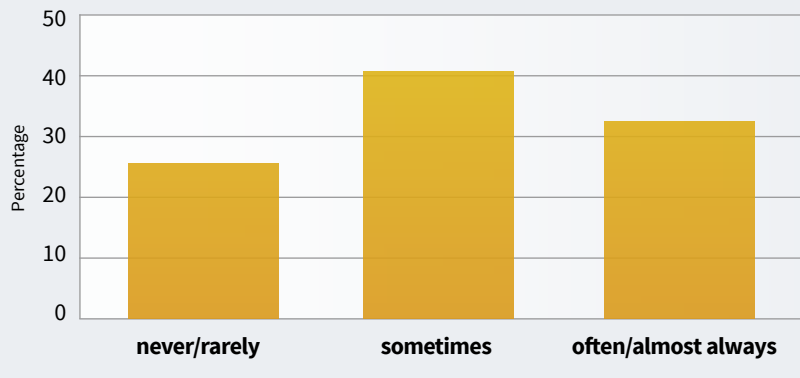

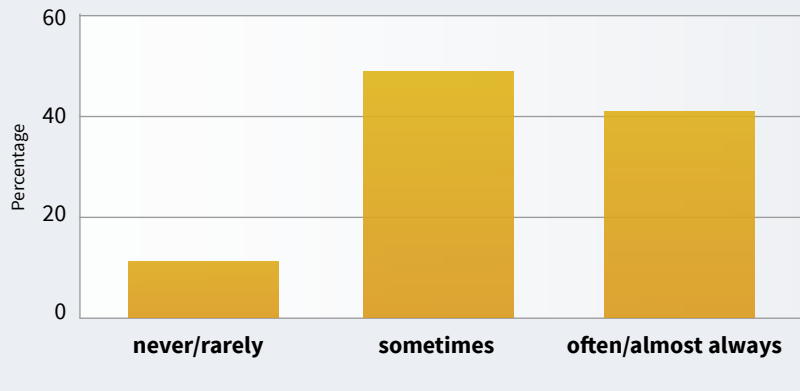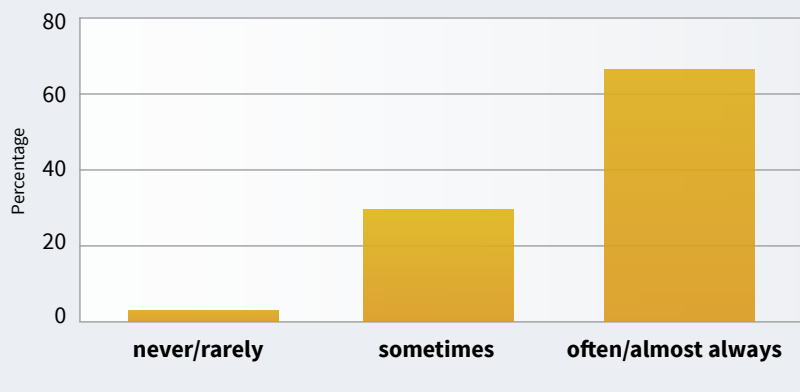**FIGURE 2.** How often work keeps you from spending the amount of time you would like with family or friends.

FIGURE 3. Thinking about your life in general, how often you feel rushed or pressed for time.

Of those who indicated they had seen a "significant" or "substantial" increase, comments often identified both a negative and a positive side to this increase. There appeared to be a recognition of increased email as a result of where technology now resides in society, as well as how this can improve communication. But comments such as, "I think there are too many ways to connect. It feels like it's hard to get a break. But what can you do about it?" or "I've started to switch all communications off when with family, but this has been met by quite scathing remarks from administrators"; or "I feel the need to limit the number of emails that get to me" are indicative of the identified problems the increase of work emails can cause.

Other comments, including "It is what it is!" or "Deal with it—part of modern life," demonstrate a silent resignation of the increased number of work-related emails. One pastor stated: "I do often feel that it is near impossible to keep on top of all the emails as well as do face-to-face ministry as much as I'd like. I get into trouble a bit from some members who think I should be more focused on keeping all my email correspondence up-to-date and organized."

Would pastors be supportive of employers restricting work related emails outside of traditional (9:00 A.M.–5:00 P.M.) work hours?

Of the valid responses to this question, 23.1 percent of pastor respondents indicated they would support their employer restricting access to work-related emails outside of work hours. The remaining 60.3 percent indicated they would not be supportive. Comments such as "I control when I choose to review my emails after hours," or "I should be empowered to control that aspect of my life myself," or "I have the choice to open work emails or not" reflect a belief that the individual reserves the right to access these work emails at any time.

Work-life balance

Five questions in the survey measured the degree to which work is perceived by respondents as interfering with nonwork activities, such as time spent with family, community engagement, or personal time.
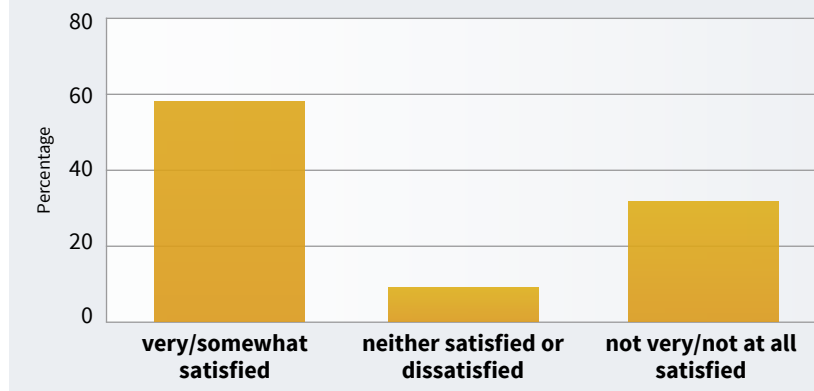
The first of these questions asked survey participants to indicate how often their work interfered with their ability to develop or maintain connections and friendships in their various communities (see figure 1). A staggering 73.4 percent of local church pastors indicated "sometimes," "often," or "almost always" as being their perceived extent of interference. This percentage increased to three out of

every four (76.7 percent) local church pastors who indicated that their work interferes with their responsibilities or activities outside of their work.

Importantly, the survey found that almost 90 percent of local church pastors indicated that their work keeps them from spending the amount of time that they would like with family or friends (see figure 2). This situation raises questions in light of the espoused values of the church relating to work-life balance.

Two questions sought to explore how respondents felt about aspects of their life presently. Almost 97 percent of local church pastors indicated they felt rushed or pressed for time when

thinking about their life in general (see figure 3).

This result contrasts with the results of the following question (see figure 4), which asked respondents to indicate how satisfied they felt with the balance between their work and the rest of their life. In this case, 58 percent of respondents indicated that they felt either "very" or "somewhat" satisfied. Only 9 percent indicated "neither satisfied or dissatisfied," but one out of three respondents (32.8 percent) stated they were either "not very" or "not at all" satisfied with the balance between work and the rest of their life (when thinking about their life right now).

A score of 0 indicates the lowest

FIGURE 4. Thinking about your life right now, how satisfied you are with the balance between your work and the rest of your life.

level of perceived work-life interference, with a score of 100 representing the highest level of perceived work-life interference. In 2012, when this measure was first explored, the average score for working Australians was 42.8; it was at 42.0 in the 2014 study.[8] Interestingly, in the 2012 study undertaken in Australia, professionals and managers scored the highest work-life index scores by occupation, registering 46.6 for professionals and 50.2 for managers. These numbers fell to 43.4 for professionals and 42.5 for managers by the 2014 study.

The work-life index for local church pastors was 53.97—significantly higher than both groups. Pocock and Skinner[9]

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point out that working at unsocial or nonstandard times is associated with high work-life interference; the pastors' responses explored in this survey data keenly point out that these hours reflect the experience of many ministers.

Summary

In this study a significant number of pastors indicated their work interferes with developing and maintaining not establishing important nurturing relationships.

The comments by pastors surveyed also indicate there could be a number of reasons for this that go beyond personal time-management practices, including a begrudging acceptance of what they feel cannot be changed, while attempting to make the best of their situation. Others indicated the risk of "missing out" on something

balance. Further research may reveal the major causes of this imbalance, potentially enabling strategies that may alleviate the associated problems. M

1   Melissa Mazmanian, Wanda Orlikowski, and JoAnne Yates, "The Autonomy Paradox: The Implications of Mobile Email Devices for Knowledge Professionals," *Organization Science* 24, no. 5 (2013): 1337–1357.
2   Peter Williams, Warrick Long, and Peter Morey, "Anytime Email and Work-Life Balance: An Exploration Into the Views of Adventist Schools

> ## Has this perpetual connectivity assisted the pastor in balancing work commitments or just added additional pressure?

friendships and with their out-of-work activities. Their work keeps them from spending desired time with family and friends. Most pastors feel rushed or pressed.

Yet more than half of the pastors surveyed feel satisfied with their work-life balance. This raises some interesting questions. Further research is needed to discern what is behind this incongruity, because the implications are that many pastors are not living and modeling balanced lives and are

important or receiving criticism for not being continually accessible outweighed the potential negatives of the relationship aspects of their situation. Several other comments imply the pastors have difficulty in defining clear boundaries between work and nonwork time, or that these boundaries are not recognized and honored by others. These suggest a potential for a culture of unhealthy employment practices, which, left unaddressed, has consequences for future generations of pastors.

Conclusion

There is clear counsel in both biblical and extrabiblical sources that pastors should be striving for and modeling a balanced life. However, our survey of Australian SDA pastors indicates a significant number of them are not achieving this

Australia Employees," *TEACH Journal of Christian Education* 8, no. 2 (2014): 39–47.
3   Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages,* vol. 3 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 280.
4   Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1923), 154.
5   Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), 244.
6   See e.g., Henry Blackby and Richard Blackby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2001); Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Victoria, Australia: The Business Library, 1992); and Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World* (Victoria, Australia: Strand, 2001).
7   See e.g., Stephen Barley, Debra Meyerson, and Stine Grodal, "Email as a Source and Symbol of Stress," *Organization Science* 22, no. 4 (2013): 887–906; Janine Mace, "Time for a Digital Diet," *HR Monthly* 6 (2013): 25–7; and Barbara Pocock and Natalie Skinner, *Morning, Noon and Night,* May 2013, www .unisa.edu.au/Documents/EASS/CWL/Publications/ TAI-Short-Report.pdf.
8   Natalie Skinner, Claire Hutchinson, and Barbara Pocock, *The Big Squeeze: Work, Home and Care in 2012,* August 2012, w3.unisa.edu.au/ hawkeinstitute/cwl/documents/AWALI2012 -National.pdf; and Natalie Skinner and Barbara Pocock, *The Persistent Challenge: Living, Working and Caring in Australia in 2014,* September 2014, www .unisa.edu.au/Documents/EASS/CWL/Publications/ AWALI_2014_national_report_final.pdf.
9   Skinner and Pocock, *The Persistent Challenge*.