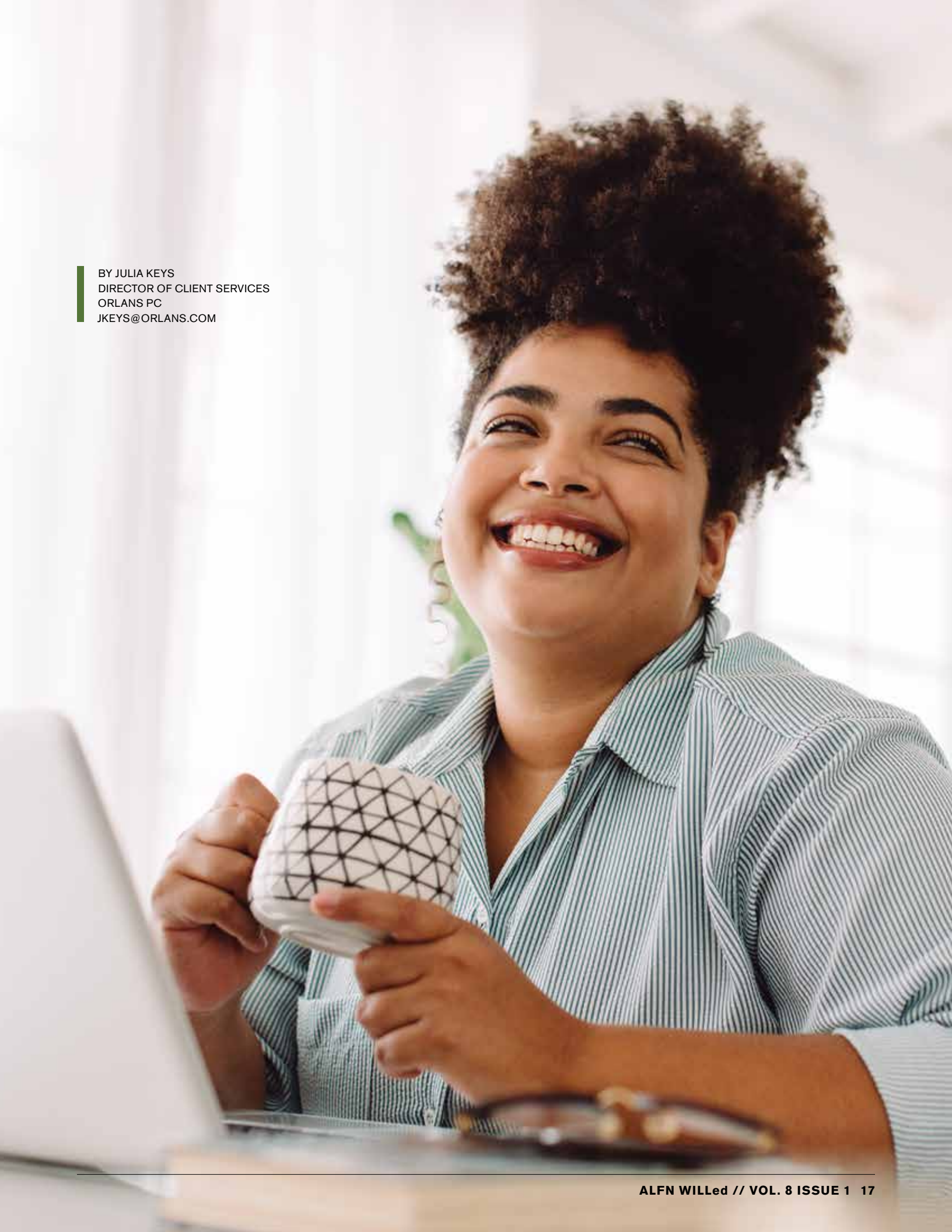HOW TO

UNPLUG

AND

MAINTAIN

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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THE INTENDED purpose of the phrase "Work-Life Balance" and its level of importance seems to be inherently understood and recognized by much of the workforce in America today. That said, the lingering question of how to accomplish this continues to plague many among workers and business owners alike. Do most Americans practice this in their everyday lives? Are businesses promoting the importance of "unplugging" while supporting this idea as a mental health awareness initiative with their staff? Is the workforce inherently aware of how to unplug and maintain work-life balance? Or is this still merely seen as a tabu subject by many organizations?

The term work-life balance, sometimes called work-life integration or work-life harmony, refers to how people prioritize responsibilities at their jobs and in their personal lives. This includes not only how they integrate those two worlds, but how much time they have for personal matters apart from work.

Let us explore what exactly we need to unplug from to feel refreshed, revived and to recharge our internal batteries so we can offer the very best versions of ourselves to our careers, families, and friends. Creating boundaries and time limits around our job commitments sets the tone and pace for equitable balance to ensure we do not reach a point of burnout mode. This also allows our physical and mental beings to remain fully present during our most important interactions following work commitments. Tuning into the people and hobbies that matter to us in life once our workday has ended and tuning out of electronics is one of the most effective ways to accomplish this.

WHY IS UNPLUGGING SO IMPORTANT?

• To maintain optimal physical/mental health and well-being: Multiple studies over decades of time indicate that the stress hormones released into the body from burnout mode due to lack of sleep, work-life balance, and overstimulation over long periods of time are harmful to our physical health and emotional well-being.

• To maintain healthy family and work/life relationships: You have heard the saying, "too much of anything is not good for you." This could not be a truer statement. When we are not at our best due to optimal balance of work and personal time, we are naturally prone to exhibit frustration, resentment and unhappiness in our actions and behaviors. Whom shall we presume feels the brunt of this the most? You guessed it; those to whom we are closest, our family and friends.

> ## "I've learned that you cannot HAVE everything and DO everything all at the same time."
> ### — Oprah Winfrey

- To increase productivity and focus: A 2018 study from Sanford showed productivity decreases when you work over 50 hours per week. In fact, companies that offer 32-hour workweeks or six-hour workdays report both an increase in productivity and higher employee satisfaction. Maintaining work-life balance maximizes your productivity optimizing your contributions and ability to focus on giving your absolute best to tasks and employees who may rely on you.

One of the many reasons unplugging is so difficult, is quite simply the psychological phenomenon referred to as "anticipatory stress," which means, the anxiety we feel worrying about something that is coming or could come at any moment. In fact, according to a recent LinkedIn survey, 70% of professionals admit that when they go on vacation, they do not fully take a break from work.

Have you ever wondered why you did not feel refreshed after taking time away from work? Have you ever felt like you needed more time or just did not feel as though you had time off at all? With today's handheld and wearable devices, AI, and the cloud, the boundaries which once existed between work and personal time no longer have a clear clock-out time anymore. They are merely blurred together. That said, technology is not solely to blame for our difficulties in developing healthy unplugging habits. Many times, the true pressure comes from a work culture which does not encourage personal

> "You can't truly be considered successful in your business life if your home life is in shambles".
> — Zig Ziglar

time or reward those who take time off. The many technological enhancements may provide us with the opportunities to do more in less time; however, our expectations for what we can "realistically" get completed in a single workday continues to outpace our output as the bar continues to be raised. All of this leaves us feeling constantly stressed and running behind, with fear and anxiety something may be missed.

Many of our beliefs about work can be traced back to the industrial revolution and the birth of the 40-hour workweek, which only appears to have increased over time, connected to the more successful ladder you wish to climb. That said, and for many, the previous twelve-hour days focused on work well into the night has hit a wall in America and likely in the world as we once knew it.

While there are many examples we could dive into regarding how our family life suffers when we are unbalanced with work and personal time, we know for a fact that our spouses and children are totally and completely one hundred percent aware when we are not unplugged. Family always picks up on our present nature or lack thereof. I know I have some witnesses reading this article that can attest to a spouse or partner at some point becoming frustrated, annoyed, or genuinely hurt when they can sense they do not have your full attention. Am I right?!? This may happen during dinner while the unplugged partner is habitually checking their email or engaging with themselves on a continual rant about a work scenario, debacle or deadline that has them worked up for the rest of the night. If conversations typically always gravitate towards work, ask yourself if your spouse et al. truly feels as though they are spending quality time with you and how that may affect the rest of the evening or may even lead into tomorrow.

Children also sense our work-life stress, anxiety,

and inability to disconnect. After their day at school, most children look forward to coming home to spend time with their family. As children do not possess the same mental and emotional maturity level as adults and cannot always communicate their feelings, they tend to exhibit patterns of behavior in an effort to seek the attention they may be missing at home while we are busy looking at our emails or engaged in work during time that should be dedicated to them.

We all collectively recognize the need for unplugging. Let us know explore ways in which we can accomplish this.

- For starters, when it is time to unplug, place your phone on "do not disturb" so you are not easily distracted by notifications, phone calls, or emails.

- You can flag emails that are not emergencies to prioritize them to be read the next day.

- If you are headed out for vacation, establish parameters and boundaries at work coupled with a plan of a designated resource who will step in for you in your absence: Make it clear that unless the sky is falling, your time away should not be interrupted.

- Carve out concentration time by blocking off time on your calendar so you are "unavailable" for calls or meetings.

- Use a timer for a task you are working on. Once the timer goes off, disconnect!

- Engage in analog activity like:

  » Set up technology free zones in your home where human connection is unavoidable.

  » Create a home library and keep a favorite read nearby.

  » Take a digital diet and complete social media detox.

  » Create instead of consuming!

  » Spend time in nature and/or with pets.

- Leave the phone at home, read a book, take an exercise

> "You will never truly feel satisfied by work until you are satisfied by life."
> —Heather Schuck

> "Time is really the only capital that any human being has, and the only thing he can't afford to lose."
> — Thomas Edison

class or gym visit and ditch the electronics while you are disconnecting.

- Maximize your time in the office, plan ahead, create to-dos and schedules. Stick to them!

- Meditate.

- If you are spiritually minded, spend quality time in this space and relate your beliefs to your commitments in both your work and personal lives daily.

Studies found that employees, including executive management, are more productive when they maintain work-life balance and have carve-outs for their family, hobbies, and hard stops on maintaining a structured routine of knowing when to shut down for the day. One of the most important "light bulb" moments we will ever encounter is realizing that we are enough!

Attention Business Leaders: truly unplugging from work is a team effort. This must start and end at the top of organizations. As a leader, if you believe in this concept and wish to retain star and valuable talent,

it is important to recognize we are in a pivotal shift of consciousness following the Covid 19 pandemic, and people have begun to recognize the value and importance of work-life balance. Stakeholders can put systems and tools in place to promote, encourage and respect their staff's time away. They need it, and they will return more productive than when they left and will value your investment in their personal well-being which builds trust and loyalty over the long-term. P.S. – Do not be afraid to be intentional because YOU need it too!

In closing, we should all ask ourselves, what does work/life balance mean to me? Am I walking the walk? What do I need to change for the betterment of my well-being, my work product, my family life, and my staff or team? We must all collectively understand this is not a request or like-to-have. Rather, this is a genuine human need in society. Exercising respect for the importance of this concept amongst our colleagues and subordinates alike will avoid counterintuitive ways of thinking and create a permanent better work-life balance for all!

It is now time for me to leave you with these thoughts and unplug! W