

Spoke Media.

KELLY: What's the weirdest place you've done your job at?

SPEAKER: I would say the weirdest spot that I've ever worked would be at a house party. I snuck into an empty bedroom and I sent out some emails about a project I was working on.

SPEAKER: At IKEA. I posted to my company's social media accounts and I answered a couple emails. At IKEA. Probably in the kitchen section.

SPEAKER: It was...a naval ship.

SPEAKER: In a hotel room in Dallas.

SPEAKER: I've, uh, done work at a family reunion.

SPEAKER: The back of a pickup truck in the middle of nowhere.

SPEAKER: So I've done work at the beach, I've done work by the pool

SPEAKER: Well in my car. Maybe had something like the computer doing a process for me with it open in the passenger seat while I'm driving because it needs to do it, but I need to be moving somewhere at the same time. I've made some people angry with me doing some work on the road probably. Missing uh, some lights and some turns. Yeah.

ALIA: Bob, what's the weirdest place you've ever worked?

BOB: This week I was sitting on the side of the New Jersey Turnpike interviewing someone with my laptop open on my passenger seat. But that's not the worst part. Usually I'm also with one arm pushing Rusty back because he's trying to put his head on the laptop screen while I'm typing and interviewing this person. So, um, but that's probably not the weirdest place. I guess the weirdest place would be uh, would've been like in Texas, I was in Texas right after uh Hurricane Katrina where there was no power, no cell phone service, no nothing, and I was in the back of a pickup truck getting sunburned, which always happens after hurricanes, typing on a computer that was on battery power, and using a satellite phone to transmit a story.

ALIA: Well, mine is on the hood of a rental car in the middle of Midland, Texas, while I was visiting my in-laws. But that's not why we're here today. We're here to talk about overwork.

ALIA: What is overwork or overworking?

BOB: I think on its surface it means working many more than 40 hours a week. But I think what it really means is finding yourself almost compulsively sitting at a desk or looking at an email at nine o'clock on a weeknight, at noon on a Sunday, on vacation, in such a state that you can't stop working.

ALIA: Yeah, it's almost like if I had to re-name the word, I would change it from overwork to always work. Like we're always working.

BOB: I love that. Yes. Yes. I think, I think that's the, the, the complete inability to separate from work I think is really what this is about.

ALIA: Yeah, yeah. I completely agree. It's, it's almost, it feels almost impossible sometimes. So overworking's a problem, right?

BOB: Overworking is a huge problem. Statistically it's a problem. All the government data shows people are working maybe 10 hours a week more on average than they did a generation ago. But I think more than that, this always-on nature of our work, just like we have always-on internet now is, is a psychological problem for us because, you know, it's almost like we can't, we never get to go to sleep and I think that's quite literal. I know people who are falling asleep at their desks and dreaming about work while they're there, that would have sounded rare and funny a generation ago. But now I think it's standard. In fact, sometimes people even brag about it

ALIA: And I want to take it even a step further. Bob, I feel like for me personally, overworking, working myself to the bone until I'm either sick or just like so exhausted has become sort of a badge of honor. It has become like something that has defined me in the last few years. And I want to talk about that.

BOB: I did a story about a year ago and the headline was "overwork is the new cufflinks."

ALIA: It's like, instead of bragging about our new stuff at parties, it's bragging about how busy we are, how much we're working, how many hours I spent at the office or in the air for work travel or whatever. It's a status symbol.

[Intro Music]

ALIA: Hi, I'm Alia Tavakolian

BOB: I'm Bob Sullivan

ALIA: And this is "So, Bob," the show that tackles questions about the unintended consequences of technology. The sometimes creepy, usually confusing digital stuff that makes you stop and go, wait, am I being ripped off? Am I crazy for wondering about this? And we're here to tell you you're not crazy for wondering about this stuff.

KELLY: Yeah, sometimes the things that are built to make your life simpler actually do the opposite.

ALIA: That is the voice of our producer Kelly. She pops in from time to time.

ALIA: We've got a lot of questions

BOB: And we're going to find some answers.

ALIA: Let's dive in.

ALIA: Okay, Bob. So overwork. I think it's glorified. And I feel uneasy about it. Like I think about this a lot and I, I don't talk about it 'cause I'm kind of embarrassed and there are lots of other implications because I'm, I'm also a woman so I feel like I have to sort of overcompensate. But we'll get into that in a second.

So, Bob, my question is: is technology better because I can work anywhere or is it worse because I can work anywhere?

BOB: I mean I think the natural answer is both. But I, let's step back for a second and think about what it means to work too hard in the first place. Right. We live in a culture that honors hard work. We all believe hard work is great. Somewhere along the line. I mean, my mom, my mom grew up, uh, pretty poor right outside New York City, but her family always managed to spend a month or two at the Jersey Shore on vacation. They all, it was eight cousins in one bungalow in a small place, but they found the time to do it, and they wouldn't have ever thought to not do that in the summer. How many of your friends Alia spend a month or two going somewhere in the summer?

ALIA: Nobody. I mean, like nobody I know. Like, my family grew up doing that because they're from Iran and like that's the only way we could see our family there. Um, but it was weird. Taking that much time off seems like either a luxury or like something bad happened to you.

BOB: It sounds almost irresponsible, right?

ALIA: Yeah, it does. It sounds irresponsible.

BOB: How did this happen?

ALIA: I don't know Bob. I'm like, I'm worried because it's not only like the problem to me isn't necessarily how much we're working. It's how proud we are of how much we're working. That's what I'm worried about. And that's what I don't understand. Like I, and I, I'm saying this about myself as well. Like I don't understand why I feel proud of myself when I've worked myself to a point of literally getting ill, you know? Why am I in this place? Why do I feel this way?

BOB: I, I think there's a whole lot of reasons, um, but what, you've already hinted at one of them, you feel a need to prove yourself partly because you're a woman. Partly because you're young. Probably right? Partly because...

A: Yes

BOB: You come from an immigrant family.

ALIA: Yes.

BOB: Partly because you're in a really competitive industry, but I feel like all of us, what, could come up with six or seven reasons like that. There's a really big one that no one wants to talk about out loud, but it's true. The 2008 recession changed the nature of labor in America, I think

maybe forever. Companies laid off a whole bunch of people and all these companies figured out they could survive with this barebone workforce, think-about how, what happens during a recession. So your colleagues are losing their jobs. You keep yours, what do you do? Boy, you, you work like heck because you're afraid you're going to get laid off too. Right? The leverage that the company has over a worker in that environment, in that mindset is incredibly strong. Right? So you overwork cause you're lucky to have a job. Well, companies have kind of kept those screws tightened and as a result, I think we're kind of living in this almost permanent recession mentality right now. And this is the new reality.

KELLY: So I think that idea is very American. The idea of working so hard and that being attached to your worth as a human. And it's like, well if I work hard enough that I'm going to get this good life. In America it's not--leisure and taking time for yourself is not valued at all or it's frowned upon.

ALIA: But I want to challenge the idea that it's American just because I keep hearing these stories about Japan.

KELLY: Oh, that's true. You're right.

ALIA: So how is it different in America? I wonder.

BOB: Well, I think one thing that has really changed is the social contract that you were just talking about, Kelly. It does make sense. Especially again, let's talk about like my grandparents and great grandparents and their immigration. If they worked like heck, their kids would have a better life. And that has proven to be largely true. Not for everybody, but for a lot of people in America. But I think what we're finding out now, especially young people, is that social contract is dead.

ALIA: Mmm.

BOB: Many young people feel like they're going to work hard the rest of their lives just to pay off their student loans. They're not getting a house with two cars. They're not getting a nice school for their kids. They're just trying to pay off their credit card bills from the last 10 years.

ALIA: It's true. I'm thinking about my dad versus even, even just me, right? My dad always said, you know, he's, he immigrated to this country from Iran and growing up he would sometimes say to me, like, Bubba, I come to this country so you can have a better life. And I work so hard so you can have a better life. Right? And I always took that for granted. I realize, but, but um, I do have a better life. And now I'm thinking like, why do I work so hard? Well, I mean if we boiled it down to like money, I work so hard so I can pay off my student loans and have a house one day. And sometimes it feels like a slog. It feels like--an insurmountable task sometimes.

BOB: Yeah. One of my favorite, uh, topic areas is the faux perk idea there. There are definitely progressive companies that take care of their employees. Some of them I've even heard of them shutting off their email servers on the weekends so people get breaks. So those do exist.

However, a lot of these perks are things like ping pong tables. So what? So you stay there on the weekend and have a ping pong tournament instead of going home. They offer free soda. Great. They offer free Mountain Dew. So you're hyped up on caffeine and can work until midnight. Free meals is the biggest one. Places that offer free breakfast before 8:00 AM to make people get to work early and free dinners after eight o'clock to make you stay late. So watch out for those faux perks a lot of companies have figured out exactly what they have to do to make people stay at their desk.

ALIA: I keep hearing companies say things like, yeah, we really want everyone at this company to have a really healthy work life balance. And then I see nothing to support that.

BOB: Like with almost every technology issue, the question comes up, would we be doing this anyway? Is there nothing new here or has technology somehow made this problem worse?

ALIA: I think technology has made this problem worse. I'm just going to say that off the bat.

BOB: Why?

ALIA: Um, because access, I have access to my work anywhere and everywhere. It's just always in my pocket, my phone, everything is connected to my work email, my work Slack. We have all these apps now to stay connected to work people all the time. My deliverables are easy to send to clients across the country. It's not something I have to be in the office for. I can be anywhere. And so it's hard to leave the work at the office.

BOB: What percentage of days do you think the last thing you see before you go to sleep is a work email and the first thing you see before you put your feet on the floor the next day is a work email?

ALIA: Oh, I'm cringing. I feel like it's like 80% of the time.

KELLY: Oh yeah. At least in the morning. I always read the 8am Slacks.

ALIA: Yeah, like 80% of my mornings I'm looking at Slack or my email immediately. Even though I've read so many things about how bad that is, I still do it. Everything feels like an emergency all the time because of technology in my mind. So yeah, I do. I feel like, Bob, like technology has absolutely made overwork and overworking worse.

BOB: I have a hard enough time responding just to email and now in order to be caught up, you know, I have to do this, this circle routine of like 12 different apps just to make sure there's not something missing. And of course, literally every day I do miss one of these things. And then by the end of the day, a bomb's literally going off, Bob, why didn't you write back to this? Or, Bob, why didn't you correct, fact check this or whatever. So you know, I, I, and I'm not a morning person, so I would just always wake up and this is 20 years ago with exactly the feeling that you guys are describing. I would wake up, I would at that point dial in my computer and I would just start right away. A lot of times I would work two or three hours at my desk at home before I would even go to work.

KELLY: You want to feel quote unquote productive all the time. And if you're not productive, then you're not contributing to society enough or you're not a good human, which is not true.

ALIA: And could it also be that we are so afraid of what it would be like to be bored or for it to be quiet. Like our lives are filled with noise and action. Maybe we don't know what it would maybe we're afraid to know what would feel like in our bodies if that noise and action was all muted.

[AD BREAK]

ALIA: Okay, let's revisit the question. So, is technology better because I can work anywhere or is it worse because I can work anywhere. Bob, please tell me you found someone to help us with this.

BOB: I have, actually. About five years ago, a friend of mine introduced me to a woman named Brigid Schulte.

BRIGID: I'm Brigid Schulte. I'm director of the Better Life Lab at New America. And the Better Life Lab is the worklife, gender equality and social policy program here. We're looking at trying to change attitudes. Trying to change knowledge and trying to change behavior. So yeah, we're trying to change the world.

BOB: I was working on this series of stories that I called the restless project, which had to do with many of these issues. And I was thinking about writing a book, but somebody said, don't worry, Brigid's already written the book. And it was just coming out. And it's a book called "Overwhelmed: Work, Love and Play When No One Has The Time."

BRIGID: The book was really an accident in so many ways. Um, I sort of fell into it. I didn't really even want to write it, I didn't even know that there was something to write about. I just thought this was just modern life, suck it up. You know. So much of the narrative that I heard is like, well, you made this choice to have children and be a working mother, so this is the price that you have to pay. And that's just the way it is. And so I just didn't, didn't ever question it. And so it was, it was such a gift to write that book eventually because it gave me the opportunity to really look at not only my life, but modern life in general through the lens of a reporter and really ask these questions, well why is it like this?

ALIA: I think about this a lot because as a woman, um, and as a brown woman I feel like I don't have any room for failure. I feel like I have very little room for anything but excellence and uh, to be excellent It takes time and energy and I feel like I have to run faster, be smarter, be better, be more prepared than my male, specifically white, straight male counterparts. It hasn't been until recently that I started questioning that. Like, like that's not healthy. Like the degree to which I work, the number of hours which I work in an effort to just be better and than my, and to stand out from my straight white male counterparts is unhealthy.

BRIGID: There's a fascinating phenomenon that, that behavioral scientists have found, they call it tunneling. You kind of have this tunnel vision, and then what you're only able to do is focus on

just the few things right in front of you. You're not able to stop and ask yourself bigger questions. You're not able to see the bigger picture. You can't get out of the tunnel and ask yourself that question, do I even want to be in this tunnel?

BOB: So for you now, it's almost like a sensation. You're like, oh my God, I'm going in the tunnel, stop, right?

BRIGID: That's right. Yeah, I can feel it closing in. Yeah. Somebody else once said because we have this crazy, achievement culture and it's all about productivity and all of these tips and tricks and life hack, hacks and tech. It's all supposed to, you know, they, on the one hand we say it's to make our life easier, but let's face it, in this kind of busy-ness as a badge of honor culture, it's about cramming more crap into your day and then somehow feeling awesome about just how insanely busy you were, and somehow you will manage to end the day standing up.

BOB: I just had an image, Alia Imagine it's Friday, you're at dinner with Brandon and you know, because you know it's coming, that there's an email on its way this evening and the icon that you have an email in your box pops up on your phone. How would, how likely are you to not open that until Monday morning?

ALIA: Oh, 100% unlikely. I struggle in that in that moment when I'm at dinner with my husband or something and I get the Slack or the email. I struggle with like am I being a terrible wife by answering the email versus am I being terrible EVP of content by not answering the email? And those things sort of, it's like, you know, worker versus wife um or partner and I, it's a struggle like inside of me and I struggle with feeling like I'm, I'm bad either way.

BOB: It's not a struggle. It's impossible. You've failed someone.

BRIGID: But I would talk to these researchers, this one woman who studies busy-ness and the fast pace of life in North Dakota of all places. And she's come to the conclusion that busy-ness, we've made it such a badge of honor that it's a choice, but she also calls it a non choice choice because you feel like you can't make any other choice if you want to fit in or if you want to have status. And so, I do try to pull out of that. Like what a sick way to get status. You know, you know, by like making ourselves, you know, ill and unhealthy and not making time for things that you enjoy, that there's something to be, you know, to be proud about that you have work life conflict or never go on vacation or don't sleep well. That's crazy. I do feel like jobs have become incredibly complicated. I do feel like technology is a part of that, and I think that we haven't figured out how to manage that well as human beings. And, and so those are things that can be challenging that, figuring out how much is enough when you are a knowledge worker and there isn't a whistle that goes off at the end of the day, you don't have any visual markers. Like I've, you know, created my pile of widgets and I can check the box. It's very difficult to figure out when you're done and when is it good enough. Um, so that's really a challenge of modern work. And I don't think we have good answers and I'm here to say I'm, I'm trying to figure it out myself.

ALIA: Isn't that so human that we all just like from, from moment one on the playground, we just want to fit in and then it just translates all the way up until we're working for a corporation or

business, and to fit in that just looks like working a shit ton of hours and maybe to an unhealthy degree.

BOB: I think non choice choice is a really important phrase.

BRIGID: Yeah. I remember giving a talk to a, a bunch of like HR and diversity inclusion folks. And in the question and answer period, this one guy said, yeah, well I'm really looking forward to having the millennials in, you know, in the workforce because they're going to come in and you know, they're going to really shake up our culture. And I looked at him and I said, shame on you, shame on you that you, a person in power, a leader who works like a crazy person, even though you espouse work life balance, that you are going to put that onus on the most junior workers to try to shake up your corporate culture. That's not fair. And frankly it doesn't happen.

ALIA: I really love what Brigid said about how CEOs usually define the culture or leadership at a company define the culture. And if you're working at a company that, um, involves a lot of overwork it's usually coming from the top. It's usually because leaders are setting that example and that precedent and it makes so much sense.

BOB: But one thing I do feel like is oftentimes the top executives do live a pretty balanced life. They do go on month long vacations. It's usually the middle managers who are trying really hard to impress the top people and climb the ladder, crushing people along the way that are the ones that ignore all of the HR Mumbo jumbo and do this to people. It's not enough to have a policy that says work-life balance. It's not enough to have an executive who lives that way. All the managers have to live that way. It has to be instituted throughout the company. I talk a lot about always on and the problem that that causes, right. But what did you find when you did this research? How much of a role, can we blame technology? Is it unfair to blame technology?

BRIGID: I think it is unfair to blame technology. I think that there's no doubt that technology has exacerbated what is this kind of swirl of overwhelm. But as I was looking at things, uh, work hours started to go up in the United States, particularly among professional class and particularly for men in the 1980s. That was long before, you know, everybody had a cell phone in their, or smartphone in their pocket. So there was something else going on. Um, but you know, the, the human notion of comparing upward that, that that's been around since humans existed. You know, I think technology exacerbates that. Um, we were already having problems with attention and cognitive bandwidth and juggling with things. Um, and technology makes it much more difficult to be able to pull away and create sort of space. And yet I think that there's great promise in technology as well. I mean, one of my favorite apps is insight timer, the meditation app. So I think that there is great promise with technology, and we're never going back, and it's just a matter of like, how are we going to figure out how to harness it in service of living a good life rather than have it, you know, be part of just one more thing that makes us crazy.

BOB: We as people haven't evolved yet to where we can say no to the technology, no to the notifications. Here's how powerful these things are. We know this every day. Hundreds of

people get in life threatening car accidents because there's a little blip on their phone that they can't resist.

BRIGID: There was this really interesting study that looked at, um, software engineers in like three different countries, the United States, and I think one was in Europe somewhere, and another one was in India. And they looked at hours worked, and then they were all working on the same thing. So you could really measure productivity. And there were all roughly productive, you know, produced this roughly the same quality and the same amount of time. And it was only the Americans who worked crazy long hours. So that was another sort of like wake up call. It's like, wow, you really don't have to work these kinds of hours in order to get the output that we say that we want. So why are we gifting our lives away back to corporate America? Why are we doing this? And I don't think we're asking ourselves that question deeply enough or often enough.

BOB: There's there's plenty of research that actually, that actually shows this. Um, basically productivity falls off a cliff after about 45 hours in a week.

BRIGID: There's almost this thought that if you're going to work flexibly, if you're going to work smart, that somehow you're, you're slacking off. Uh, and yet the data shows that that's not the case at all.

KELLY: Alia, I have a confession to make because we track our time at Spoke Media for because we have so many projects we're working on. Last week I was getting everything done by 4:00 PM.

ALIA: That's great!

KELLY: So I was looking at my time tracker for last week. I was like, oh my gosh, it says I worked 33 hours. And I was like, ah, I'm a bad employee.

ALIA: And isn't it so funny that like sitting in the seat across from you while you're telling me this, I'm like, oh my God, that's incredible. But then when I'm in your shoes, and I'm looking at my Timeular which I also have done recently, and I see that I worked fewer hours but also accomplished exactly what I needed to do. I started getting like emotional and upset.

BOB: If you're not really trying to prove something to your boss, and you're not trying to prove something to your coworkers who all love you and see what you're doing and you're probably not trying to prove something to your family. Who are you trying to prove something to?

ALIA: Me, myself. It's because we want to feel like we're working hard and maybe we don't feel like we're working hard when we accomplish something in less than 40 hours a week.

KELLY: Maybe it goes beyond company culture and more just like society.

BOB: I think you can do the same thing with tech here, right? Like, oh, it's all my fault. I should put the phone down. Oh my God, it's all Facebook's fault because they've hacked me. You know? And obviously it's a mixture of these things, right?

ALIA: Yeah.

BOB: Um, but I think it's wildly unfair to give technology a pass on the fact that everybody's working too much.

ALIA: I agree.

BOB: I mean, like always on technology is incredibly new.

ALIA: Yes. You're right. Access. We do. We have access. I'm sticking to it. When I heard Brigid contradict you Bob, I was like, wait, maybe I'm wrong, but I, yeah, I don't, I think technology is complicit in all of this.

ALIA: But Bob, you, you told me about something recently that like really I think is like the most extreme case of overwork. Right?

BOB: This was actually a, a case in Indonesia involving a woman named Mita Diran who was an ad writer at Young & Rubicam. And like a lot of young people, she was fueled up on energy drinks and bragging online about how much she worked. And she sent out a tweet, 30 hours of working and still going strong. And within a day she had fallen into a coma at work and died. And her father blamed overwork for her death. So she literally bragged on Twitter, 30 hours of working and still going strong. And then within a day she was dead.

BRIGID: I spent some time in Japan this past year, uh, for a project that I'm working on. It was, I would look at overwork culture and like, I really wanted to go to sort of the granddaddy of all over work where they actually have a word for dying at your desk, you know, dying from overwork.

ALIA: That word is Karoshi. It can be directly translated to "overwork death."

BRIGID: And it was sobering. It was, it was depressing and you couldn't talk to like, here in the West we only hear about Karoshi when there's sort of like one big, spectacular, horrific death. And what I was really interested in is like, what is that culture like that bubbles along, you know, so that you do have that occasional spike, but there's something going on that makes that uh, you know, more likely to happen there. And that's what I was really interested in and what struck me is that you could not talk to anybody, whether it was my Airbnb host or the people I was interviewing or, or just people that you met, you know, in a restaurant in the evening. Everybody had a story of somebody who either overworked or died or knew somebody. And that there's a lot more we don't know about because people are too ashamed to report it. And yet there are these government statistics, they do track it. And I was talking to this one union organizer and I'm like, you know, how do you, how do you stand it? There's just, it's everywhere. And he looked at me and he said, yeah, it's sort of like, you know, you guys in the United States and your mass shootings, you know, how do you, how do, how do you stop that? You guys aren't doing anything about it.

ALIA: This feels like such a problem. I guess I'm wondering like what, what is our reasonable hope for this?

BRIGID: You know, it's difficult for Americans. We are so much bigger. We are so much more diverse. In many of these countries that are very homogenous, like in the Nordic countries, a lot of these policies reinforce national culture, national identity. You know, wouldn't it be great if we could do the same thing here and recognize that our national culture, our national identity is based on the strength of our diversity and really embrace that and lift all of the children up for the future. So that's what we're trying to do here. I really want people to see that we're all, we're all on the same side and we all need these changes that we're all part of this same, you know, we're all what makes America great, and we need to embrace all of us. Uh, having discussions about how to have a good life and making that, making opportunities available for everybody, that's not a partisan issue. That's kind of why we're here. Right? Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Let's, let's embrace the roots of who we really are.

ALIA: I love that. So it's like what if we taught our kids rather than work yourself to the bone so you can have everything or at least something, pursue a good life.

KELLY: How many children do you think would say like, oh, when I grow up, I want to be happy. It's like when I grow up, I want to be this, this, this my profession is going to be this. It's just like, well be happy. You know?

BOB: The phrase life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is very specific to the United States. The phrase, from John Locke is life, liberty and property, and there's good and bad reasons why they removed property from the expression, um but for our purposes we're going to call it the good reason. It's actually incredibly beautiful that our Declaration of Independence says the purpose of our country is to allow people the pursuit of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And I feel like in this episode we are inviting people to declare themselves independent from what technology is doing to rob their lives of that, to, to rob them of their life, their liberty, and their pursuit of happiness.

ALIA: Yeah. We're inviting people to stop pursuing stress or some ridiculous, unreasonable idea of success and long hours. We're inviting you to pursue happiness, to pursue fulfillment, to pursue, I don't know, relationships, love, truth. I mean, I know that sounds really lofty, but like it sounds like we need to shift our priorities.

ALIA: Okay, so let's try to answer this question now. Bob, Kelly, does technology help or hurt my work life? I think it does both. Like I think it can help my work life. It can make things easier, but personally I haven't figured out how to harness technology in such a way that it liberates me from working all the time and makes things more efficient. Instead it provokes me to work all the time.

KELLY: Yeah. It reminds me of our internet good or bad answers where it's like, well, Internet is good, people, the way we use it, you know, could be quote unquote bad and it's kind of how I

feel here. It's like technology can really help work, but the way we've used it or the way we've learned to use it for work is not healthy.

BOB: I just think it's an unfair fight right now. We all have examples of technology making work easier for us. It makes it easier to go in late if something happens, some emergency occurs. It makes it easier for us to check in on our pets, like, summon cars so we can race home. There's lots of things that technology help, but if this is a tension between the ways it helps and the ways that it hurts, there's just so much investment gone into the technology that drives us crazy, that makes us respond to emails at crazy hours of the night. That makes us feel inadequate, that makes us feel like we've never done that. Something has to happen in order to rebalance the tension as there always has been.

ALIA: We need real rules -- either laws or strict company policies that could maybe shut down email on nights and weekends. But we also need real peer pressure. Like, co-workers can check each other on this stuff. Instead of encouraging overwork, flat out say 'I'm not going to answer you until Monday morning.' I love it when I send out a Slack or an email super late at night or really early in the morning, and I sort of forget what time it is, and I don't immediately get a response from one of my coworkers. And I'm like, oh, yeah, this is a reminder that I'm sending this at an absurd time. And like, nobody needs to be working right now, including me. And tech can help with this too. Hello out of office messages aren't just for vacations! We need something because clearly left to our own devices, we can't be trusted.

ALIA: Next week, Bob answers one of your questions, and it's one we get all the time: how do I have a safe password? Find out on next week's episode of So, Bob. So, Bob is a Spoke Media production. It's hosted by me Alia Tavakolian and Bob Sullivan. We're produced by Kelly Kolff with help from Reyes Mendoza and Carson McCain. This episode was mixed by Alexander Mark. Our head of post production is Will Short. The songs you hear in this episode come from FirstCom. Our executive producer is Keith Reynolds. Thanks to this week's guest Brigid Schulte. You can see more of her work on Twitter @brigidschulte.

If you have questions about your digital life, or an unintended consequence of technology you use every single day, write to us at Sobob@spokemedia.io.