

Tell the boss you can't stay late

You want to be a team player and that means staying late occasionally when the boss asks. However, if it's a request on a day you just can't do it—or a too-frequent occurrence—follow this advice:

Be direct, but polite. Say “I’m sorry, but I can’t stay late.”

Offer another solution. For example, “I can make it a top priority in the morning and have it to you by 10 a.m.”

Don't justify your response. You don't need to offer specifics as to why you can't stay late. Whether you have a prior commitment or just want to go home to your family really isn't your boss's concern.

Be proactive. If your boss regularly drops last-minute tasks on you at day's end, start stopping by his or her office an hour before your workday ends to ask “Do you need me to take care of anything before I go home?” You'll prove that you care about the job, without infringing on your personal time.

— Adapted from [“How to Tell Your Boss You Can't Work Late Tonight,”](#) Liz Ryan, *Forbes*, www.forbes.com.