

Email Overload

Emails have changed the world and - some people would say - not necessarily for the better. For all business people, time is a precious resource and time management - or mismanagement - is a vital issue.

All of us have experienced the dread of opening our inbox and finding it clogged up with emails.

At the same time research has found that over 60% of workers are addicted to checking emails at home or on holiday and most responded immediately to new mail even if they had to interrupt a meeting or what they are doing. Research has also found – not surprisingly - that productivity drops when we are constantly distracted by emails. So what is to be done?

Here are some tips (some of which contradict each other! Choose the ones that suit you).

1. Deal with it once. Try to respond to an email (if indeed it needs a response) the first time you see it. Of course, that does not mean checking your emails all the time. If you don't deal with the email the first time you read it, you are going to have to read it a second time and perhaps a third time.
2. Tick off the easy ones. If you can respond or deal with an email with a one or two line response, then do it now.
3. Limit your interruptions. Open your email when it suits you. Turn off the automatic checking facility. Review emails every few hours not every few minutes.
4. Pick up the phone. How often do you bounce emails back and forth with someone else? How about picking up the phone and resolving the matter or walking into your colleague's office two doors away! Using the phone or going to a colleague's office is often a lot quicker, and a lot less distracting, than multiple emails.
5. Use folders. Use folders to your advantage. By putting your emails into folders (and having your email system automated where possible) you can create an efficient filing system that will stop you having to continually search for emails.

Here are some “don'ts”

1. don't email when you are angry.
2. don't email when you are drunk (or have taken any other substances!).
3. don't email gossip.
4. don't email when you have nothing to add.
5. don't email when you should be concentrating on something else, or paying attention to someone.

And here is one person's way of dealing with emails


As you read every email classify it into one of five categories - do, delegate, delete, defer, archive.

1. If it is something that can be dealt with quickly then do it. Reply to the email immediately and then archive it.
2. If it is something that can be passed onto a work colleague or can be delegated, forward the email then file it in the delegated folder.
3. if it is something you don't need to care about or something you don't want to read, then delete it.
4. If it something that needs some care and time and attention, then file it in the defer folder and deal with it at an appropriate time.
5. if it is something to keep for future reference but you don't have to actually do anything about it, archive it.

Hey presto! Every email has either been done, delegated, deleted, deferred or archived.

You will still need to go through your deferred folder and deal with these messages. If you put something into the deferred folder and it is still there after two or three weeks perhaps it should be moved to the deleted folder.

You will also need to go through your delegated folder and see what needs to be followed up.



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