

Email Management

Now, I told you I will talk about email management. The vast majority of business owners and employees spend way, way, way too much time writing and checking emails.

Listen to this data from the Radicati group who studies this and researches this. Last year, the average person working at a corporation sent or received 167 email messages per day. This number is expected to rise according to 219 email messages a day within the next three years. I mean, this is outstanding, assuming that an average email takes 1 minute to process - that's 3.65 hours of simply checking and sending emails. That is half of your work day. It is way too much. You need to manage email.

Okay, the first thing you do. One - If you are the boss, you need to reduce the email-crazed culture that you are living in within your organization. You need to create email standards. The question you ask yourself - ask your employees. You are about to send an email. Would you or your employees be willing for that email to print it out? To put it in an envelope? To put a stamp on it and to pay the 45 or so cents or whatever the cost of mailing a letter is these days? Go to post office? Go to the nearest mail box and mail that letter? Would you be willing to mail that letter? I'm not saying that that should be your email standard, but I can guarantee you - if that is your email standard, you will immediately get rid of 99.9% of the emails.

So what you need to do is set some standards and figure out what is appropriate and what is not appropriate. Go through the emails that you've received and that you've sent over the last month and figure out which ones fall into the 20% of real value added. Which are the ones that can really help

in your company versus hurting you?

Secondly, train your people to consolidate emails. Most people, a lot of times, will send two emails when one should have sufficed. Send an email and then five minutes later, "Oh, I forgot this. They added this." You want to train people to possibly create the email, save it as a draft, wait a minute, think through it, make sure that you don't forget anything and send it once to reduce some of the clutter.

I'm going to recommend my third key for reducing the email-crazed culture. I recommend using Gmail to thread your email strings. I've used Microsoft Outlook for many, many years, and I fought moving to Gmail - Google's email system - I fought it tooth and nail and did not want to change. What I like about it is that it threads emails. What that means is that if you send an email with the subject line, you send it to five people and say you get five responses in it, and you replied, and then somebody else replies - in some email strings, eventually you might get to 30, 60 email replies back and forth. What Gmail does is that it ties it all together so that you open up one email that has the latest email in the string, and it gives you access to everything that has been written in the previous strings. And so, all the information is right there. It saves you time having to go back and file these emails that are together, go back and reference something that has been written earlier in those email strings. It just saves a whole bunch of time. So I'm a big fan of Gmail. It just threads your email strings.

Another key to reducing the time spent in email management. This is key. This technique revolutionized my personal time management. Check and reply to emails in batches, not when they come in. I always know when somebody checks their email when they come in. I always know

somebody who is not productive when I send them an email, and three minutes later, I get a reply back consistently. On one hand you say, "Hey that's cool. They execute well. They can get things done." That just means they're checking their email all day. That means they are constantly getting interrupted. What you need to do is you need to put checking email into your daily schedule. And you need to put it in two to three times max - checking your email. It is much, much faster and much more productive than checking emails as they come in.

Particularly, if you are using Gmail and your email is threading. So what happens a lot of times with a threaded email is that if you don't check your email for an hour, you may get like four responses in that same thread. And rather than reading them one at a time, reading those four responses at once allows you to be much more methodical in your response, get all the information you need, make a decision, and make it faster. So you need to set two to three times a day. If you want to set an hour, set half an hour. So from 10:00 to 10:30. From 1:00 to 1:30. From 4:00 to 4:30. Those are your email checking times. That's when you check email.

If it's not you know, one of those times, you don't check email, okay? If something is that urgent that it can't wait, somebody can reach you some other way. Now, if an email does come in – a new email while you are in an half-an-hour email checking period, you can respond right away, so sometimes people will get lucky and get a response right away. But it also trains others to plan in advance, like what I said about "got a minute" questions.

People need to start planning in advance and realize that if they have an urgent question, it is not going to get answered right away, most likely.

There are very few emails that require an absolute immediate response and can't wait until your next email block. By working in the block once again - Parkinson's Law - I can guarantee you that if you have 20 emails in your inbox that you need to clear within the next half an hour, you will get it done, and those same 20 emails that took you half an hour to deal with now, if you did them one at a time of your day, it would have taken 60 minutes or an hour and half. It will take two to three times as long. Batching your emails - this one tip or technique alone will massively increase your productivity. You need to batch your emails. It's going to be hard for those that don't do it. It's very tempting to check your email / reply to email because it's fun and it's easy. We need to get rid of the fun and easy. We need to discipline ourselves.

Next email management technique is you need to keep your inbox clean. You have a very uneasy feeling when you have emails in your inbox. Conversely, you will have a very energetic feeling when you go and you look at your inbox and ahhh - its empty.

There is nothing to deal in this inbox. I can move on. You have dealt with it. It's a terrible feeling when there is a lot of stuff in your inbox and there is so much you feel that have to do and you are not going to accomplish it. I've seen people's inboxes with 360 messages in it, and some of them are messages that were sent a month ago. You can't work like that. Your brain is clutter. You have 360 messages in you inbox. You cannot possibly accomplish what you want to do with that clutter. So here is what you have to do. Here is how you solve this.

First off, you need to use the filtering technologies that basically every email system has. Every email system - Yahoo has it, you know, Yahoo Mail, Gmail,

Outlook - has the ability to filter or automatically sort certain emails. For example, a newsletter. You get a newsletter that you like and has valuable information that helps you to do your job. That is important to you. Those newsletters are not going to be read in your email checking periods. It will take too long.

You are going to filter those non-critical messages and you are going to read those emails in your reading time blocks you are going to be setting when you schedule your calendar. It's okay to say, "During this hour, I improved my skills. I read this, and this, and this." Those newsletters get read in reading time blocks. They are not read in your, you know, throughout the day. They are read in specific time blocks. So first off, filter those non-critical messages at your inbox. Get them into your non-critical folder that you will read when you have non-critical reading blocks.

Secondly, you need to create your to-deal-with folder. And "to deal with folder," you are going to get... let's say your half-an-hour email checking period... you are going to get some things that come in that you want to get done but are just going to take longer than the allotted time period. If this is the case, and it's not an urgent thing that needs to be done absolutely and immediately – it can get done in the next day and the next week - you need to move this into your to-deal-with folder.

Now, at the end of every day, you are going to purge. You are going to get rid of your to-do folder by moving those items to your to-do list. You are going to move them to your overall to-do list or to your weekly or your daily to-do list, okay? Now if something's that absolutely urgent that has to be done that day, you figure out a way to get it done that day. But most emails - even those which are important - move it to your to-deal-with email folder,

out of your inbox. At the end of the day, you go through it - your to-deal-with folder of your email. You purge it, you get everything out of there, you move it from your to-deal-with folder to your overall to-do list and then you figure out where it belongs in your overall to-do list. Do you want to prioritize it right now? Do you want to stick it to your weekly to-do list? Or tomorrow's daily to-do list?

You also should create another folder called your to-deal-with-follow-up folder. And this is for follow ups. This is when you send somebody an email that says, "Hey, I want you to do this." Make a copy for yourself. Or when you are waiting on something like that, make a copy for yourself, put it in your to-deal-with-follow-up folder. And this is something you check periodically to make sure that those follow up tasks have been done by somebody else. Just check in every few days, once a week, depending on the urgency. If something is very urgent, you can go always stick it on your to-do list. But this allows you to make sure that all of your emails are dealt with appropriately from other people.

Finally, you need to opt out of spam emails and email newsletters that you are receiving but are not providing value. You need to periodically purge those emails. You need to say, "Hey, I'm not getting value from this newsletter." Just unsubscribe and don't deal with the clutter.