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Time Management



Easing E-mail

By Dr. Don Wetmore, President, The Productivity Institute

Last year, the U. S. Post Office delivered more pieces of first class mail than ever and e-mails exceeded the volume of first class mailings. We have created another layer of communicating with one another and an additional responsibility to monitor and manage.

It's interesting. Technology is often heralded as a servant for us yet frequently we become a servant to it. E-mail was trumpeted as the new communications tool that would surely put first class "snail mail" out of business. Last year, the U. S. Post Office delivered more pieces of first class mail than ever and e-mails exceeded the volume of first class mailings. We have created another layer of communicating with one another and an additional responsibility to monitor and manage.

E-mail is a useful tool but many feel controlled by this new vehicle. The average businessperson is getting around 80 e-mails per day and many feel that about 80% of the messages in their "In Box" are of little or no value.

So, as always, rising to the occasion, I have four suggestions to help you to become better at "Easing E-mail".

- 1. Get off the lists.** The best way to deal with a problem is to never have it. If you are receiving a lot of unwanted e-mails, ask to be removed from the various lists. This would include your inclusion in unwanted "cc" lists or unappreciated solicitations from those promising "unlimited wealth without risk or effort".
- 2. "Unlisted address".** Just like getting an "unlisted" telephone number that you share only with those whom you want to give direct access, you might want to get a separate e-mail address that you use only for the important communications you wish to receive.
- 3. Check it once or twice per day.** Many I speak with are become chained to their email server, monitoring incoming email on a continuous basis. Maybe this is because e-mail creates its own sense of urgency, but most of the communications are not all that urgent. I let my "incoming" batch up and I respond to them a couple of times per day.
- 4. Deal with it.** Like handling paper, you don't want to get into the "shuffling blues" where you read e-mail, postpone action, save it, re-read it later, and allow things to slip through the cracks. As you open each e-mail do one of the following: a. If it requires a quick response, (it will only take a minute or two), respond to it and delete it. b. If it requires a response but is not the best use of your time, try to think of a way of delegating it. There's a lot of difference between "I do it" and "It gets done". c. If it is going to take any serious amount of time to respond (beyond a minute or two), schedule it for action in your Day Planner and then download the message, save it, or print it out for future action.

I personally receive approximately 250 e-mails per day and by practicing the suggestions above, I can handle that volume in about an hour, taking advantage of this fantastic tool but not being controlled by it to the distraction of more important tasks in my day.

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