

MANAGING E-MAIL: ETIQUETTE AND PRACTICE TIPS

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The great number of e-mails everyone receives at work and at home affects all of us. A British study showed that “workers distracted by phone calls, e-mails and text messages suffer a greater loss of IQ than a person smoking marijuana.” “The constant interruptions reduce productivity” according to a survey carried out by TNS Research and commissioned by Hewlett Packard. Below are the top 10 e-mail time wasters.

Top 10 E-mail Time Wasters

1. Low priority messages and spam
2. Distractibility
3. Cluttered inbox
4. Taking on work that belongs to others
5. Keeping it going
6. Failing to stay “on topic”
7. Responses based on poor scanning of info
8. Writing too much and too long
9. Not using the tech tools
10. Overwhelmed by volume

To help overcome the above listed problems, try following:

Top 10 E-Mail “Cardinal Rules”

1. Be careful what you send
2. Understand use of To, CC and BCC
3. Reply vs. Reply All
4. Simple, short, readable
5. Consider tone – how will this hit the reader’s ear?
6. Be security conscious
 - a. Caution with attachments & links Social Engineering – good subject lines
7. Read the WHOLE thread – then reply
8. Select topics judiciously – some things don’t belong in e-mail
9. Organize e-mail address into your Contacts as you go
10. Business e-mail is generally for business

1. Low Priority Messages & Spam

Protect your work address by using a free account such as Hotmail or Yahoo when you need to log onto sites for research and they require your e-mail address be provided. You can also use www.spamgourmet.com to obtain a disposable e-mail address, which is temporary, or www.bugmenot.com for logins & passwords.

2. Distractibility

To not become distracted by your e-mails you can set aside a specific time each day to review and respond to all e-mails; turn off the pop-up window and/or sound for new e-mails and finish the e-mail you are writing.

3. Cluttered inbox

Try using a different view such as unread, colors or conversation. Use a filing system to move your

e-mails and especially use auto-move to automatically file e-mails. And most importantly, learn to let go. Too many people use the delete folder for filing e-mails. It is never emptied. If it is important, then file the e-mail in a sub file for future reference. If it is not, then move it to the deleted folder and empty that folder every night when you shut down your machine.

4. Taking on work that belongs to others

Be careful to check the e-mail to see if it is just informational versus requiring response. Too many times one feels compelled to respond to an e-mail that was actually addressed to another and they are just being sent the e-mail for information purposes. You don't have all the answers and you do not have to reply to every e-mail you receive. Managers should delegate what they can and mentor your employee. This demonstrates trust in your team.

5. Keeping it going

Sometimes the e-mail lacks real substance, but continues to generate replies. Just delete it.

6. Failing to stay "on topic"

Too many times another topic is added to an e-mail completely off the subject. To avoid not being able to find an e-mail with the appropriate topic, when the subject changes, start a new e-mail with the appropriate subject. Also, make the relevant information "pop." Remember, e-mails are for short informative topics, not areas requiring long discussions, those should be in person.

7. Poor Scanning of Information

Too many times people do not read the whole e-mail before responding. They scan the subject line and the first line and then respond inaccurately requiring additional follow-up e-mails. Remember, multi-tasking is not always effective.

8. Too Many and Too Long

E-mails are most effective for short topics of limited scope, topics that don't require in-depth discussions and questions that don't require complex answers.

9. Not Using Tech tools

Commit to learning and using new tools and create a strategy for your team to use prefixes for certain types of e-mails and use rules to auto-sort and/or auto-file.

10. Overwhelmed by Volume

Don't be discouraged, respond to quick messages right away and don't let the simple things stack up.

Remember, it doesn't happen all at once. Discuss strategy with your team and try a new view in your Inbox. Try one of these ideas every week and you will discover ways to take control!