

6 Tips to Tame Your Email and Maximize Your Time Management

Don't fall into these common time-wasting traps.

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When you're a serious professional, you are often able to make connections and acquire more resources. In fact, growth naturally depends on that. What you *can't* do is magically tack more minutes onto the day. Time is a limited resource and by far your most important asset, so you can't waste it. To make every second count, make sure you avoid these common time-wasting traps.

1. Using your inbox as your to-do list

So often, people look at their email first thing in the morning, read all their messages and let what's in their inbox set their agenda for the day. And then what happens? Your *real* priorities get sidetracked and you don't accomplish what you meant to do. You're working for everybody else's goals, not yours.

What you *should* be doing is handling your email around a battle plan for the day that you've already worked out. Your battle plan is just a set of short-term objectives that help you overcome hurdles and tackle bigger strategies step-by-step to actually get your overarching goals completed. And there's a simple way to do this efficiently.

First, make three folders right underneath your inbox. Label them Priority 1, Priority 2 and Priority 3. Then go through your inbox and handle whatever messages you can on an immediate basis. If there's anything you can't do right away, then put those messages in the priority folders. From there, create two to four sections in your day where you get in and out of your email in a clearly defined way. That way, you're not letting email interrupt other things you're trying to achieve, but you know you'll have a chance to get to your communications even as everything else is happening.

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2. Not answering customers quickly

These are the days of text and video. People expect fast – if not immediate – responses. Studies have shown that as many as 80 percent of customers expect businesses to answer customer service messages within 24 hours, with 37 percent expecting an answer within the hour. So try to respond as quickly as possible. If an answer is complicated and you really don't have the time for it at the moment, then at least send an email that tells your customer that you'll get back to them with a complete response later.

3. Not fully answering your email

When you don't answer everything in an email message, you inevitably encourage even more messages as people try to get clarifications or more information from you. This additional traffic steals precious time away from innovation, collaboration and handling other essential jobs. Before you press send, review your email and make sure you've addressed every point. Consider going even one step further: Anticipate the questions or needs the recipient might have in the future and address those issues, too.

4. Being long-winded

On the other hand, don't overdo it. Fully answering an email doesn't mean you have to write a thesis. Get to the point. Stick with short words and sentences. Aim for just four or five lines to keep yourself on track.

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5. Treating "reply all" like candy

Creating an email doesn't involve just *your* time. It involves everyone else's, too. Respect that, and include only the people who really need to participate in or know about the conversation. If you can use the bcc field, do so. Then, when people do reply, their answer goes only to you and not everyone else.

6. Answering email when you're upset

Not every day or situation at work is the most pleasant, and we all have personal struggles other people on the team might not know about. So if you're already upset, or if you get an email that ruffles your feathers, step away from the computer. Take a walk around the block. Try to talk to the person involved face-to-face or over the phone so it's easier to be clear with each other.

Time is incredibly precious. You respect yourself and everyone else better when you recognize this value and don't squander the minutes you have. Once you eliminate these errors, you'll be able to operate much leaner and achieve even more of your goals.

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