



TrainUtopia

31012 La Quinta Drive
Georgetown, TX 78628
Office: 512-423-5416, Fax: 253-369-6205
Website: www.trainutopia.com

ARTICLE

SPEND LESS TIME ON EMAIL – AND ACCOMPLISH MORE

By Michael Masterson

If you work for a business that has more than eight or 10 employees, chances are you are struggling with too much internal information. However much you may want to be informed about everything that's going on, you can't possibly keep up on it all without increasing unnecessary stress and damaging your productivity.

My largest client issues a flood of e-mails every day. Some come from its corporate VPs. Some come from its divisional leaders. Some come from its operational heads. And some -- not too many, but some -- come from me. If I thought it were important to read and respond to every one of those e-mails that come to me, I'd be spending at least eight hours a day doing that. By the time I would get done, I'd have zero energy left to make useful improvements or suggest productive new directions for my client.

One recommendation for handling a deluge of e-mails comes from Bill Jensen, author of ["The Simplicity Survival Handbook"](#). Don't read every word, he says. Instead, scan them with the purpose of discovering what action is being called for. "If the communication does not contain an action and a short-term date [to complete that action], ignore it."

This applies to all communications -- even from top brass. If hitting "delete" makes you worry that you're missing something, do it anyway, he says. There is a 69% chance you'll get this exact communication again, a 48% chance you'll get it a third time, and a 36% chance you'll have to show up at a meeting or event to review it.

I have no idea where Jensen got these numbers. Their exactness makes them suspect. But I do think he's right about freeing yourself from the feeling that you need to read and possibly respond to every message that's sent to you.

I am in favor of scanning incoming messages. And I like the idea of paying attention to need-by dates. But it makes no sense to let a memo's urgency determine whether you are going to respond to it. That will turn you into a slave to the latest crisis. You'll spend all your hours fighting fires that aren't dangerous or can be fought by others.

Here's the three-step method I recommend:

Step 1. Scan the message to find out who's in charge of the issue/problem that it's about. If it's not you, make sure that person has been copied on it. If he has, either delete the message or send a short reply saying you trust that person to handle it. If he needs anything from you, he should let you know.

Step 2. Ask yourself: "If I ignore this message, will the issue/problem resolve itself?" If the answer is "yes," either delete the message or send a short reply suggesting that you are going to give the issue/problem some time to work itself out.

Step 3. If the memo is about something for which you are responsible -- and it's not likely to be fixed without some adjudication (see "Word to the Wise," below) -- ask yourself: "How important is this in terms of the business's most important goals?" If it's not important or if you are otherwise preoccupied, delegate it to someone else.