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# How to Manage Your Email

By Dr. Kathleen Begley, Book Author and Professional Speaker

**Note to Readers:** Here's another offbeat blogletter on business communication and current events from Write Company Plus, a corporate communications training firm located outside Philadelphia. In respect for your busy schedule, writers and editors have arranged seven at-a-glance ideas at the end of this article. Skip directly there if you lack the time to read the entire document.

I adore email. As I toil in the home office of my communications training business outside Philadelphia, I enjoy being on the receiving end of just about anything. Dog cartoons, vitamin advertisements, send-this-message-to-10-other-people-or-lose-your-job-your money-and-your-teeth -- I get a kick out of them all. OK, maybe I need to get a life, but there it is.

As for sending, I think email – along with its younger sibling instant messaging -- is the best thing to come along since chewy, unsliced, whole-grain Artisan bread. How much easier it is to hit a send button than to put a note into an envelope, find a stamp, and schleppe it to the post office. Outlook Express, I kiss the cyberspace you float on.

But guess what? An increasing number of corporate bigwigs fail to share my enthusiasm on this topic. And they're taking steps via a new policy called email-free Fridays. One of the first to take this drastic action was Mark Ellison, chief operating officer of U.S. Cellular – a high-tech giant, no less. Since stripping his people about two years ago of the ability to send or receive electronic messages on the last day of the work week, Ellison says, employees are freeing up about 7,000 hours for other activities. In recent months, several other corporations have followed U.S. Cellular's lead. Among them are PBD Fulfillment near Atlanta and Intel in San Francisco.

As I hinted earlier, I fail to grasp the seriousness of email overload, perhaps because I apply priority management principles to the 100 or so messages that show up daily in my inbox. Upon receiving any communication, I immediately reply, forward, file, or delete it. That's it. I figure that if I mistakenly get rid of an important message, such as news that I am the surprise heir to a \$5 billion fortune, it'll show up again. Or so I hope.

But, according to IDC Research, a huge opinion survey company, many individuals and organizations are struggling mightily with the sheer volume of email. Recent estimates are that close to 40 billion messages wind their way each day over the Internet. All totaled, the email glut reportedly adds up to \$650 billion per year in lost productivity for American firms. The average white-collar worker, according to IDC, receives about 150 computerized messages in an eight-hour period. That same person spends almost 10 hours a week managing this information.

Wow.

I probably spend 60 minutes per week on email – tops. And for me, the time consumption is far outweighed by its payoff. And what is that? I immensely treasure the ability to build and continue relationships on at least a limited basis when it's simply impossible to meet in person. That being said, I get that email us causing a lot of angst among business users. If you're among them, here are some ideas to help you get a grip:

**Avoid email first thing in the morning.** Start your work day with a cup of coffee, a chat with your manager, a review of your to-do list. People who log on at the crack of dawn tend to permit technology to run them, rather than the other way around.

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**Check only twice a day.** According to research, you lose momentum each time you interrupt non-email tasks to check your inbox. Unless you're expecting an urgent message from your boss or client, discipline yourself to stop peeking every 10 minutes.

**Get off group lists.** You're in no way obligated to continue receiving messages of zero interest or relevance to your life – even this fabulous blogletter. If my pitter patter seriously annoys you, for example, by all means hit your reply button and tell me to get off your back. The last thing I want to do is alienate prospects and customers.

**Stop writing so much.** If you write fewer emails, it stands to reason you'll receive fewer responses. Duh.

**File for bankruptcy.** Another email trend sweeping the world is a dramatic move in which you arbitrarily delete every unread message in your inbox – and start fresh. Among proponents of this so-called email bankruptcy is Michael Arrington, who blogs under the name TechCrunch. He claims to receive more than 1,000 messages per day, which certainly explains his feelings of being overwhelmed with reply debt.

**Seek professional help.** Apparently, some individuals are so consumed with email that they neglect their families, their friends, and their personal growth – sure signs of addiction. Last year, Oprah magazine featured an article about such a person. The headline was "The 30-Day EMail Detox." Can an inpatient rehabilitation center for emailoholics be far behind?

**Consider alternatives.** Believe it or not, email is far from the only way to exchange ideas. An obvious alternative is the telephone. And there are more. For instance, if you need to chat with a person in the next cubicle or down the hallway, you might consider taking an action admittedly quaint and increasingly implausible: speaking face to face.

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