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E-mail, the new corporate cancer

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E-mail usage is cultural. E-mail practices are contagious. And most businesses are in a downward e-mail productivity spiral with no idea about the potential impact to their productivity and profits. It has become a hidden cancer.

When e-mail first appeared on the scene, it was the best thing since sliced bread, inexpensive, convenient, and easy to use. The problem was, as there is with any new development, that people didn't receive any formal training on how best to use their e-mail. Employees developed their own, mostly bad, habits of e-mail use.



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Now these e-mail misusers are costing their organizations thousands of dollars in unproductive work and spreading their bad habits to their co-workers.

E-mail use, both good and bad, is contagious. Since e-mail touches all of us several times a day, an office e-mail culture shift can move at lightning speed. Think of the practices of copying everyone under the sun, just so you don't miss someone. Or how about using e-mail as a chat room with multiple recipients to resolve dilemmas?

Or using e-mail to critique someone's performance? Or keeping 500 messages in your inbox as reminders of all the work you need to do? Or hitting "Reply all" when you really need to reply to one person? Culture is changed, and valuable time is wasted.

The costs are staggering. Consider this: every time you let your e-mail interrupt your work, it takes you an average of 4 minutes to get back on track. If in one day you receive 15 e-mails, you've just lost an hour of billable, productive time. If you have 10 people in your department, each interrupted by 15 daily e-mails, the department loses 10 hours of productivity in one day. Multiply that by every

department every day and you can see how office-wide unproductive e-mail use can be an enormous drain on your profits.

There are, however, certain practices you can instill into your management and employees to create a profit-rich e-mail culture. Certain things, like setting "Automatic Send/Receive" to every 90 minutes, creating specific action folders to prioritize your e-mail, and setting up the two-minute rule, can have an incredible affect on office productivity. Changing an office culture is hard, but with a little leadership, improved returns are not far away.

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