



E-ddicted to e-mail? Tips for fighting disempowering e-mail habits

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Poor e-mail management triggers other workplace problems, including high stress and inordinately long hours.

Now, those afflicted with this problem can take heart. A productivity expert and coach has designed a program she says will help beleaguered office workers conquer e-mail overload.

However, before implementing this five-step 'E-mail self-management program', people should understand the root causes of their e-mail woes, says Marsha Egan, president of the success coaching firm, The Egan Group, Inc. based in Reading, Pa.

E-mail overload is usually rooted in misuse of the e-mail system and ineffective management of incoming messages, says Egan, who was named one of Pennsylvania's 50 Best Women in Business in 2006 by the ATHENA Foundation a Chicago-based organization whose mandate is to support, develop and honour women leaders.

Speaking of e-mail Egan says: "This great technology never came with training on how to use it productively. Bad habits have since developed."

She says her program is designed to eliminate these disempowering e-mail habits, and make people more productive.

The leadership coach says successful practice of her five-step system - launched late last year - is dependent on one critical shift in perception.

"People need to change the way they think about e-mail, and consider it a delivery system. Checking e-mail is not a task," says Egan. "It's the first step."

The second, she says, is committing to leaving your inbox empty every time you check it.

The third is emptying your inbox by applying the "two-minute rule". In other words, if you can, handle each e-mail in two minutes or less.

The fourth step is creating specific action folders for temporarily filing e-mails that can't be handled within two minutes.

And the last step is switching your "send and receive" e-mail function from 'Automatic' to 'Every two hours.'

What about the e-mails in the action folders? That's where the time management component fits, says Egan.

Dealing with the remaining e-mails should be factored into the workday as if it were a project on a to-do list. That way, she says, dealing with e-mails requiring more attention won't offset a scheduled workday, simply because it will be a scheduled project.

"That way, e-mail won't control you. You control it."

The five-step program is offered as a one-hour tele-seminar and has drawn mainly middle to senior-level management, and small to medium business entrepreneurs. The feedback, says Egan, has been "overwhelming".

Baha Habashy, author and co-founder of Markham-based Integrity+ Consulting, agrees that this group of people is more apt to experience e-mail overload.

"Their life is very busy. They deal with complex topics and issues. E-mail is not the proper tool for communication at that level," says Habashy. "A topic that takes 25 e-mails to resolve can often be solved with a two-minute phone call."

Based on his client data, the average senior-level executive receives about 100 emails per day, 50 per cent of which are carbon copies. Ideally, he says, the number should be 20 to 30.

At the top of Habashy's tips for preventing e-mail overload is to not send any to begin with in an effort to avoid a snowball effect.

But if you must, he says, send it to as few people as you can. And, limit one message and one recipient to each email.

Identifying the objective of the message in the subject heading is crucial to the recipient saving time, says Habashy. "Start with a verb that defines the action required."

Egan just released the 12-step Email E-ddiction Detox Process, a series of tutorials also aimed at fighting the email addiction.

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