



strategies to
take back
control
of your
inbox,
and your
day

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potential \approx unleashed

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Take back **control** of your Inbox, and your day

1 In – ToDo - Done – Delete

Leave unread email in your Inbox. Once you have read a message you have two choices: deal with it now or deal with it later. If you are going to deal with it later, put it into a folder called *ToDo*. If you want to deal with it now, do so and then either delete the message or move it into a folder called *Done*. Don't waste time creating a complicated folder structure to store all your emails – it just makes them harder to find. The search features on modern email systems are fast and powerful making it quick and easy to find emails later. *ToDo* and *Done* should be all you need.

Turn off Email notifications

Unless you work on a helpdesk, your job is probably not to deal with emails as soon as they turn up– so turn off the distraction of email notifications. You decide when to deal with your incoming emails, not the person sending the email. Consider setting an appointment with yourself once or twice a day to process your emails; block this time out in your calendar. Outside of those times, focus on doing your plan for the day.

3 Every day process your ToDo folder

Each email in your ToDo folder can either be dealt with in a single sitting or needs to be converted into a project. Either way, deal with it or convert it into a project and then move the email into your Done folder immediately.

Unsubscribe

If you routinely delete certain emails without reading them, unsubscribe from that source. Why are you wasting your time pressing delete every morning?

5 Get the result you want first time

Ask yourself these questions, and then ensure your email drives to these outcomes:

What do I want to happen as the result of this email?

Am I making it easy for people to identify and take the actions I need them to take. Is the importance of a problem and its implications being made clear?

Am I giving credit clearly to those whose deserve it when sharing good news?

Am I making it clear the steps I am taking to manage the problem I am warning (my manager) about?

Teach you team how to use email

Share the 10 Commandments of email with your team, and encourage them all to use email better.

The Ten Commandments of e-mail

Our business is awash with email, but we don't communicate very well. There is a difference between providing data which is meaningless and useful information that can be acted upon. Consider these Ten Commandments for email, and improve the way we communicate:

1. I trust you to do your job, you don't need to copy me in every time you ask someone else to do something. I trust my team to do their job too- don't cc me when you ask them to do something- I won't chase it for you; that's between you and the person you contacted.
2. If you want me or my team to do something, ask directly in the email, don't just copy me on a message relating to the subject and expect me to work out what you want.
3. Use the @NAME convention when you want different people to pick up actions from an email. Eg Customer X has reported a problem with the system, @FRED can you call them and find out exactly what it is @BILL can you check our logs to check if we can see a problem at our end.
4. An escalation is a direct email describing the problem and actions to be taken; it is not sending an email to someone else and cc-ing the world. You are managing the situation so you need to think it through and email your analysis as a status update- I don't need to know every action you are taking. Like I said, I trust you to do your job.
5. For quick updates and messages use only the subject line and prefix it with '1:' to show its a one line message that doesn't need to be opened
6. I will assume that I am required to take no action when cc on an email; cc means For Information Only, and it should be used sparingly. Don't expect me to react when cc on an email.
7. Minutes and actions live in formal documents and stored in the project folder on the file server and must never be in the body of an email- attach the document to the email or (even better) put links to the document in the email.
8. A blind cc (BCC) is almost always the wrong thing to do- deal with the situation a better way
9. Categorise your email before sending: If you require action from the recipient, prefix the subject with 'ACT:' making it easy to identify those emails that require action. If the message really is just for information, prefix the subject line with 'INF:'
10. Pick up the phone more often and speak to me