

## Taming the email Monster

If you ask most people in corporations today what they do, they most often begin with “I’m swamped with email!”. Schedules are disrupted. Priorities are changed. The volume of email continuously increases and the stress multiples exponentially. It is considered an inescapable fact of work in this information age and workers have come to believe that this is a normal part of work.

It isn’t.

In our years of coaching knowledge workers, one thing has become clear. The technologies that are available to increase productivity have become more important than the process. In fact, the need to exploit the promised benefits of 24/7 availability, whether accessed through the computer, or mobile devices, has caused workers to forget the process altogether. The process is *business communication*, not email.

The constant digital buzz often doesn’t result in increased productivity for the company or the person. In fact, there is an increasing level of burn-out in knowledge workers.

How do you regain control of email and actually get the work done that you should?

1. **Realize that email is not a job.** It is a routine communication channel regarding your work.
2. **Choose the correct venue for the nature of the communication.** Email may not be the correct venue to announce that there is a fire in the building. Broadcasting on the PA system may not be the right venue to announce that the company is going to begin a blood drive in two months. Inform others how you intend to use and respond to email. It is only one of many communication venues. Just because you can, doesn’t mean you should. If the business message can be best communicated effectively with smoke signals, then that may be a better choice. Select the best medium to obtain the best returned response. Options include paper, phone, IM, Text message, meetings
3. **Determine for yourself when and how often to open your mail.** Turn off any signal that alerts you of incoming mail. There is always a perceived urgency to those signals that rarely match the importance of the message. Believe it or not, the Blackberry has an off switch.
4. **Open and deal with every email in your inbox.** The inbox is not a file cabinet. It is the mailbox to your environment. Once you look at a message, either delete it or move it to where it belongs. You would never stuff your unpaid bills back in your mailbox at home just because you were not ready to pay them. So don’t do that in the email inbox. Create a structure to house work in progress.

5. **Take steps to reduce the volume of email that you receive.** Inform your people if you don't need to see every FYI. Ask for exception reporting and reduce the business as usual messages. Get off of distribution lists that are irrelevant to your job. Teach people how you prefer to be communicated with.
  
6. **Don't over-distribute.** Clean up your distribution lists. Don't reply to all. Avoid sending useless FYI email. Always think if you are using the correct venue for your own business communication. Who knows... a smoke signal may be just the thing.