

10 GOLDEN RULES TO REDUCE THE VOLUME OF EMAIL INTERRUPTIONS

An email inbox is basically a to-do list that you are behind on, based on someone else's priorities. Unfortunately, (or fortunately) a lot of your email could largely be because of your own behaviour.

#1 - When you die, your inbox won't be empty. Pointed out by Richard Carlson in "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff". It seems obvious, but how many times do you send just one more email. The simple truth is the more you send, the more you get. If you are **unlikely to respond** to an email (e.g. at home), then **don't check**, it is just going to be on your mind for 12hrs longer.

#2 – Delay sending emails, Outlook lets you defer when they send and Boomerang is a great Gmail add-in. The biggest problem with sending emails is that for **every one you send, you get five back**. Getting it out of your inbox, means that someone else has it, in an **effort to show everyone how hard they are working** they will glance through it and send you back questions (*Perhaps a better question is, are they doing so little work that they have time to respond to emails as soon as they arrive?*).

#3 – Get out of the habit of opening your Inbox first, rather open your Calendar/Planner (Outlook can actually do this by default). In theory your calendar should be your priorities, your inbox someone else's. *Why would you start the day with someone else's priorities?*

#4 - Switch off notifications of incoming email (better yet close it completely). Studies have shown that it can take anywhere from a few minutes to an hour to get your concentration back after getting distracted. People are not as good at multi-tasking as they think. If you have ever been caught behind someone trying to walk and send an email, you will know this to be the case. **Set times to check your email or set it so notifications are only shown if certain criteria are met.**

#5 – Use rules such as conditional **formatting** & highlighting, flagging and auto-filing to make it easier non-urgent newsletters arriving in your inbox at 6am can wait. Your **boss** and your **boss's boss** perhaps should **grab** your attention immediately.

#6 – Reduce ambiguity and improve readability in your emails. With the volume of emails, most people only skim read. Some of the easiest ways to reduce ambiguity:

- Use bullets (easier to skim read) of key points
- Make certain key parts **bold** or even **highlighted** (I bet that was the first thing you noticed)
- Don't ask for availability, suggest times and confirm

The polite "fluff" can be added elsewhere (or nowhere).

#7 – Distinguish between a real concern and someone just trying to **cover themselves**. **Following up with a phone call**, is usually quicker than carefully orchestrating an email (5mins vs 30mins?). You can always follow up with a few bullets afterwards, so the person can cover themselves.

#8 – Stop Copying in everyone! CC actually stands for Carbon Copy, from back in the days of faxing, when it was only used when important documents were sent. These days it stands for **Comfort Copy**. So the person can say "But you were copied in". Your boss is far more likely to prefer the occasional **key forwarded email with a few bullets highlighted at the top**. They hired you to do a job, not forward emails. If you are a boss, perhaps ask for a short summary from time to time. Then only have urgent matters highlighted.

#9 – Create "Templates" and "Quick Part" for sections/emails that you send regularly.

#10 – Group/arrange e-mails by conversation. This means you can catch up without trudging through your entire inbox. **Last e-mail says it was resolved**, enough time spent. The great thing is typically when filed, they will still show in the group (dependent on mailbox provider).

Bonus Tip – Casually share some of these "rules" with anyone who sends you too many and/or unnecessary emails.