

Information overload

You click on your laptop, ready for a nice, uninterrupted stretch of time to get some serious work done. Your Blackberry buzzes with tweets. You make the mistake of hitting “send and receive” on your e-mail software, only to be bombarded by a slew of messages, all so, so, urgent.



Minutes pass. The work you set out to accomplish? Forget about it. You are trapped, deleting requests for money from a long-lost uncle in Nigeria, forwarding gigantic PowerPoint files featuring endless pictures of farm animals, and letting your mom know when you’ll be in town for a visit.

In a recent article in the Harvard Business Review about navigating the tsunami of information in the Information Age, Paul Hemp quotes a study by Microsoft researchers that revealed a stunning point: Once someone’s work has been interrupted by e-mail, it takes them an average of 24 minutes to return to their task.

He also offers ways to reduce e-mail overload for both senders and recipients. For recipients, he suggests:

- Turn off automatic notification of incoming e-mail, and set aside part of the day to check and respond to e-mail.
- Don’t waste time sorting messages into folders; inbox search engines make that unnecessary.
- Don’t highlight messages you intend to deal with later by marking them as “unread.”
- If you won’t be able to respond to an e-mail for several days, acknowledge receipt and tell the sender when you’ll get to it.

A few tips for senders:

- Write a clear subject line and start the message with the key point.
- Paste the contents of an attachment into the body of the message when possible.

- For very short messages, put the whole thing in the subject line so the recipient won't have to open it, followed by "eom" for "end of message."
- Minimize e-mail ping-pong by making suggestions instead of asking open-ended questions.
- Think before you hit "reply to all." Does everyone on that list need to take their time to read that e-mail?
- Send fewer e-mails.

This post is adapted from an article by Paul Hemp in the September 2009 edition of the Harvard Business Review. Learn more at hbr.harvardbusiness.org/.

I Am Powerless

We all know the feeling of being overwhelmed. Maybe it's a task that seems too big to handle, or a situation that just won't change. The result: Feeling helpless and out of control, and powerless to take charge of what's going on.



But you aren't powerless. A million times a day, you exert your influence, whether it's deciding which cereal to buy at the grocery store or making a new hire. Staying in bed or hiding under your desk accomplish nothing, and only make the big monster in the closet – whatever it is – seem that much more daunting.

If you do nothing, nothing changes. If you do something, things will change, bit by bit.

Here are a few tips to give you the power and hope you need to get things done:

- Maintain a positive mental attitude, or PMA. Tell yourself you can do it and you will. To quote the Little Engine That Could, "I think I can. I think I can." If it worked in a children's book, it will work for you, too.
- Remember that old definition of insanity, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results? Try a fresh approach. Stand back, take a break, ask a friend or business associate for their opinion. Maybe putting that square peg in that round hole won't work after all.

- Break things down. Don't cave in to fear about jumping off the cliff and stand cowering at the edge. Look a little more closely and find the footholds and handgrips that will take you safely to the bottom, step by step.

Just remember that nothing is as bad or difficult as it appears. You will make it through this challenge because you have the power to take control and affect change – you just have to use it.

Are Daunting Tasks in the Way of Your Success?

The Success Trek team is ready to talk! Sit down with us and we will listen to your issues and challenges. For more information, contact Theresa Valade at t.valade@success-trek.com or 219-680-7720.

Information on Free HR Webinars

Success Trek partner, Preventive HR, offers a free Webinar. The title for November is "Recruit and Retain the Very Best Employees."

To receive notification of the date and registration, go to www.hr Sentry.com and provide your email address. You will also be notified of future free webinars. These webinars are provided by HR Sentry which Preventive HR offers through an alliance.

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