ATN Business Sense
November 2009

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Dealing with information overload has become an issue for many people. If it is not addressed their well being and decision making can suffer along with productivity. Instead of focusing on their jobs and the tasks at hand, people are distracted and the one cost that cannot be quantified is the cost of distraction. Employees can lose time dealing with information of little or no value. Unchecked, the cost of distraction can even destroy a business.

For a start, have a To Do list which is a very simple but extremely powerful tool both as a method of organizing yourself and as a way of reducing stress. It will help you remember to carry out all the necessary tasks and to complete the important ones first and not waste time on trivial tasks. We all have too much to do and the fact is we can only focus on three or four things at the same time. Identifying "Must Do", "Should Do", and "Could Do" is a simple yet effective way of selecting the priorities. And remember, "No" is not a dirty word. Learn how to use it again and free yourself from the pressures you create for yourself every time you say yes when you mean no. Saying yes, when you would rather say no, gives you stress. Learning to say no puts you back in control.

Business leaders and managers must set a good example for their people. That can be as simple as deleting any email which does not have anything in the subject line. Paul Hemp, writing in the September 2009 Harvard Business Review says companies need to establish electronic policies such as creating a weekly "e-mail free morning": "a ban on in-house though not external e-mail…"

Hemp suggests 10 ways to reduce e-mail overload. As a recipient, to avoid constant distractions, turn off automatic notifications of incoming email then establish specific times during the day when you check and take action on messages. 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". Just simply start to draft a reply which sits in drafts as a reminder until it is completed and sent. If you won't be able to respond to an e-mail for several days, acknowledge receipt and tell the sender when you're likely to get onto it.

As a sender, make messages easy to digest by writing a clear subject line and starting the body with the key point. Use boldface headings, bullet points, or numbering to highlight action items – and note who's responsible for each one. To eliminate the need for recipients to open very short messages, put the entire contents in the subject line, followed by: "eom" (end of message). Whenever possible, paste the contents of an attachment into the body of the message. Minimise e-mail ping pong by making suggestions "Should we meet at 10?" rather than asking open-ended questions "When should we meet?" Before you chose "reply to all" stop and consider the e-mail burden that your choice places on each recipient. If you wouldn't be able to justify that burden, remove the recipient from the send list.

For your own sake, send less e-mail: An outgoing message generates, on average, roughly two responses.

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