

Bad eMail Habits Wasting Your Time?

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eMail has become a primary means of communication for many of us. It also can lead to more work and effort than is necessary.

Are bad email habits distracting you, wasting your time, and causing miscommunications with clients, employees and others? Making a few simple changes to the way you handle email will help you improve focus, save time, and communicate more effectively.

Here are five bad email habits that could be holding you back—and positive alternatives to get you moving forward.

Bad habit #1: Sending emails late at night, early in the morning, and on weekends. This sends clients the message that you're on call 24/7, so they treat you that way—which ultimately stresses you out. It also sends employees the message that you expect them to be on call 24/7—which stresses them out.

Instead, try: Limiting the hours during which you and your employees send work-related emails. Prohibiting email from, say, 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., will give everyone time to unplug, rest, and recharge.

Bad habit #2: Using email to discuss topics best suited to other means of communication. Overly complicated emails lead to confusion, while scheduling meetings by email leads to endless chains of “reply all.”

Instead, try: Finding alternate ways to communicate complex or sensitive subjects. Use calendar tools to plan meetings, IM or chat to discuss simple topics, and phone or in-person conversations to deliver bad news or hash out complex issues.

Bad habit #3: Setting alerts to be notified of every incoming email. Getting pinged every time you receive an email is distracting and makes you less efficient and productive.

Instead, try: Turning off alerts (unless you're waiting for a very urgent email). Set specific times to check email, such as in the morning, before and after lunch and in the late afternoon.

Bad habit #4: Using vague, unclear subject lines. Generic subject lines like “Hey” or “Meeting” or “Question” require recipients to open the email to see what it's about and makes it harder to search for relevant emails later on.

Instead, try: Using specific, detailed subject lines to speed comprehension and save time.

Bad habit #5: Sending overly long and complex emails. With more users checking email on their mobile phones, an email that's too long will likely never get read—it will just get ignored.

Instead, try: Limiting email length to five brief sentences, max. When more detail is necessary, use attachments.



Also consider using email rules to automatically sort incoming messages so you can focus on the most important ones first, and unsubscribing to emails you no longer want to receive (instead of just deleting them every day). By changing your bad habits, you'll gain control of your email, become more productive, and communicate more clearly with employees, partners, and customers.