

EMAIL MASTERY

Email. This one word starts most people on tirades about the amount they get, the confusion over what to do with it, the demands it makes and how it consumes their time.

Understanding ways to organize your electronic mail system makes a huge difference in your day. This article focuses on basic email management principles that apply to most email systems.

My experience as a productivity consultant has shown me that people tend to dive in and react to emails individually as they first see them in the Inbox, deciding to either respond immediately or defer until later. As the Inbox window overflows the screen, emails that weren't responded to are forgotten as they disappear into the abyss below the visible part of the screen. Out of sight, out of mind.

This method is counterproductive for at least two reasons. First, without a system to prioritize the responses, critical information in earlier messages may be found too late to keep your initial response accurate. Secondly, the only way to find unanswered emails is to scroll through the endless list of emails. Scanning the email list is further complicated by unhelpful subject lines and if the email is marked as read or unread. It's exhausting and confusing effort and contributes to later crises.

Your challenge: Take the time to strategize how to organize your system so *you're* in control.

Depending on your email system, follow up flags and labels may be added as reminders to respond to emails. Or, if yours doesn't or flags just don't work for you, you can organize by folders, based on the action required of you.

Try this for systems that let you create folders, like Outlook:

- **Create four new folders:** Respond, Hold, Read, and Projects. Depending on your email system the folder names may need to be adjusted to keep the Respond, Hold and Read folders at the top of your filing system tree. Ideally the Projects folder is positioned below the three mentioned above.
- **Add subfolders** to the Projects file so you have a listing of your responsibility areas. This can be by client, by associate, by type of work, organizational chart or whatever you or your company decides.
- **Change your opinion** of the Inbox from that of a place to work from and store emails to that of a holding tank for emails you haven't sorted yet. Before you can prioritize your work you need to know what you have, just like when playing cards we need to shuffle them around in our hand before playing.
- **Move the emails** that require an action out of your Inbox file to either Respond, Read or Hold.



- Hold is the file that stores emails concerning someone else's pending action. For example, Jay wrote to tell you he ordered the new chairs that support your current project. Put this email in Hold so you can shadow Jay and the chair delivery.
- The Read folder is for things you want to read, but aren't project completion critical. We know you probably won't read them anyway, so they're out of the way in case you have some time to catch up.
- Move the emails that don't require a response into a Projects folder. You will have them for reference, but they won't be mixed in with the emails that require an action from you.

Now with your deliberately organized and prioritized email list you can spend focused time responding to the emails in the Respond folder, following up on those in the Hold file and being able to find the reference emails quickly.

This system is one of many ways to organize email and works best in Outlook.

Your challenge: Take the time to strategize how to organize your system so *you're* in control. That's email mastery.



Mastery Coaching and Consulting focuses on helping people excel and companies succeed through coaching, consulting and presentations. Areas addressed include effective productivity and information management skills, improved leadership and communication abilities, all of which help clients to get more out of life personally and professionally.

Published, quoted or featured in many local and national publications, principal Leslie Robison has presented organizational and personal achievement topics to businesses, chambers of commerce and community groups.

A member of a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers since 1999, she has served on NAPO's Philadelphia chapter board as Professional Development Director. She also served on the board of the Institute for Challenging Disorganization.

Recognized through the ICD as a Certified Professional Organizer in Chronic Disorganization and Master Trainer, Leslie has authored resource materials and presents teleclasses to both her peers, clients and the public.

With Leslie's help I've been able to really make some genuine changes in my life and career, things I've been thinking about, hoping to do something about and yet every year I was no closer to realizing. ~R. G.

Your presentation was interesting, helpful and fun and thanks to you I've found myself trying different methods to get organized. ~B. W.

Clients include individuals, small businesses, and corporate personnel.

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