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GUIDE TO

NOT
CHECKING EMAIL

an eBook by **JARED GORALNICK**

MOST PEOPLE spend more time during the week on email than they do with their families. They also **lose a quarter of those days to recovering from interruptions**, primarily due to email.

I'd like to think you're not most people. But there's no doubt email overload is a problem, and I intend to offer you specific advice for tackling it — *fast*.

HOW THIS BOOK WILL HELP

First, I'll address the problem. Do you realize how much time you lose every day? (skip this if you're already ready to change). Then I'll explain an important and necessary concept, the exact process to follow, and how to tweak your tools to ensure your success:

There's plenty of evidence that:

- Americans lose more than **a quarter of their day** to interruptions
- Email is the most persistent interruption **over which <u>you</u> have control**
- The **world will not end** if you don't check your email today

Attention Mismanagement Can Ruin Your Life

Email is not the core of the work we're paid to do, yet it is taking up more and more of our time.

EMAIL INTERRUPTIONS KILL OUR DAYS

"One consistent aim of technology has been to put as much information and communication at the hands of as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. Technology has, to this end, succeeded beyond our wildest dreams. While, in theory, this should be an excellent way of increasing innovation, in practice it is dangerous as it provides far more information and activity than the human brain can comfortably process."

Basex Report: *The Cost of Not Paying Attention: How Interruptions Impact Knowledge Worker Productivity*

Email can sometimes *feel* overwhelming, and in fact, its effect on our productivity really is a measurable problem. According to a *New York Times* article that referenced the same Basex report above, 28% of a knowledge worker's day is spent on "interruptions by things that aren't urgent or important, like unnecessary e-mail messages—and the time it takes to get back on track."

The sheer volume of emails that we receive daily continues to increase. The Radicati Group points out that "in 2006, the average corporate e-mail user received 126 e-mail messages per day, an increase of 55% since 2002." If trends continue, they estimate that knowledge workers will spend up to 41% of their day just dealing with email. (*Radicati Report, 2006*)

But you likely have responsibilities besides email back and forth. To perform your job, there are times you need to be able to focus on the task at hand. Thus we have a growing conundrum: email is not the core of the work we're paid to do, yet it is taking up more and more of our time.

ELIMINATE EMAIL INTERRUPTIONS AND RECLAIM YOUR LIFE

Applying a few simple tips can win you back that eight hours every week, and keep email from even coming close to 41% of your day.

There are obvious ways to eliminate or manage most forms of interruptions. If you shut the door or put on headphones, people may not come into your work area. If you turn off your phone's ringer, a lot of people won't leave voicemails. But whether or not you're checking your email right now, messages will soon find you (and there will be lots of them).

However, email is unlike other common forms of communication (in-person, telephone, and IM). Email has two unique features: it's asynchronous (the sender and receiver's exchanges can take place minutes or days apart) and it can easily be distributed to many people at once.

Being asynchronous and easy to distribute means that:

- An email often doesn't require an immediate response (*great!*)
- An email's topic is often much less important than the subject of a call or visit (*this may not be bad*)
- Email often arrives in much greater volume than other forms of communication (*this can't be a good thing*)

These traits of email beg the specific questions that this book will address:

» **How long can you go without checking your email**…but still be reached with time-sensitive matters?

» **How do you more quickly identify truly important messages**…and spend less time on the less relevant ones?

» **How do you manage a large volume of email messages**…without feeling overwhelmed?

» **Now, on to the solution!**

- Multitasking is anathema to accomplishing any one thing
- If you can focus on **one task at a time** you'll be much more productive
- Batching email (and your other tasks) **will noticeably change your life**

KEY POINTS

STEP 1

Don't Multitask — Batch

THE MYTH OF MULTITASKING

As you can see from the studies in the last section, people lose a lot of time (over two hours every day!) from interruptions. Much of that time is lost from switching tasks and getting back on track. It turns out **that technology has made multitasking especially easy, but people are pretty terrible at doing it.**

If you've had four IM windows blinking while attempting to put creative thought into a project, you've witnessed just how much longer things take with multitasking. Not only does it take time to get on track when switching between tasks, it prevents us from ever gaining flow:

> Flow requires a depth of thinking and a focus of attention that all that context-switching prevents. Flow requires a challenging use of our knowledge and skills, and that's quite different from mindless tasks we can multitask (eating and watching TV, etc.). Flow means we need a certain amount of time to load our knowledge and skills into our brain RAM. And the more big or small interruptions we have, the less likely we are to ever get there.
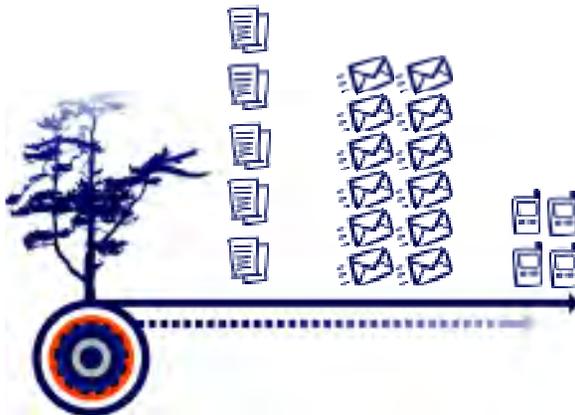>
> And not only are we stopping ourselves from ever getting in flow, we're stopping ourselves from ever getting really good at something. From becoming experts. The brain scientists now tell us that becoming an expert is not a matter of being a prodigy, it's a matter of being able to focus.
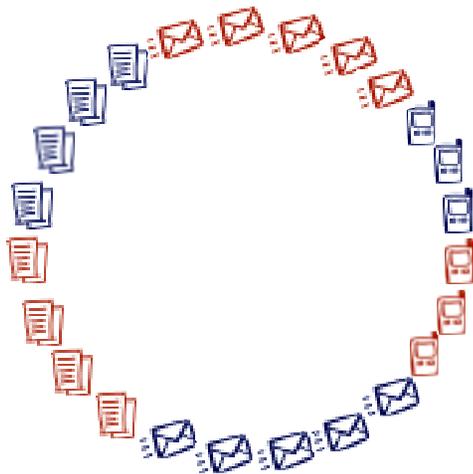>
> Kathy Sierra, *Creating Passionate Users*.

Rather than multitask (for instance, reading emails as they arrive but then going back to what we were working on), we need to focus on one thing. The easiest way to focus and stay away from interruptions is to batch.

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WHAT IS BATCHING?

Batching is grouping similar tasks together to save time and increase focus. You probably already do this when you run errands that are near one another on the same trip.

Batching requires just two things to be effective:

- **Grouping** like tasks together
- **Staying focused** on the tasks until they're completed

In the errand example, this would simply mean visiting the nearby stores without a detour in the middle. With email, it would mean avoiding tangents while going through your messages.

WHAT DOES BATCHING HAVE TO DO WITH EMAIL?

When was the last time you gave your undivided attention to your inbox? Do you *just get to emails when you get to them*, or do you *dedicate specific priority time* to dealing with them?

I'll admit it. My heart used to skip a beat when the New Mail icon would light up. I'd read the message (maybe it was important, probably not) and then I'd go back to what I was doing.

Eventually, the already-read but not-dealt-with messages would accumulate, and every once in a while I'd deal with messages that seemed urgent.

I'd end up with hundreds, even thousands of messages in my inbox.

Batching is a completely different approach. Batching is:

- Giving email your focused attention
- Making a deal with yourself that you won't stop working on your inbox until it's empty
- Not checking email again for at least a few hours

An amazing thing happens when you make email your top priority: you actually get through all of it. Fast. *In Step 2, "How to Clear Your Inbox," the actual steps are described.*

> **NOTE:** If you're worried about missing important messages when you're not checking your email, that's what my company's product, AwayFind, helps with— finding your urgent messages so you can get away from your inbox. When timely emails arrive (a delayed meeting, a message related to a big opportunity, etc), you'll receive a text message, voice call, or notification on the AwayFind iPhone or Android application. Then you're only interrupted when you need to be.

THE REALLY COOL THING ABOUT BATCHING EMAIL

By batching your email you'll end up with more time to spend outside of your email. You can apply the batching technique to non-email tasks, too: focus on your other responsibilities one at a time (or grouping like tasks together) without shifting your focus until you're complete.

I recommend giving yourself a major task, and then once you've completed it, reward yourself by checking your email. *Email as a reward?* Don't you get a little excited when you check your postal mail, not knowing what you'll find? If you don't check your email until you've finished a task, you'll give yourself an incentive to stay on top of things. It's fun and it's surprisingly effective.

Give yourself a *major task*, and then once you've completed it, *reward yourself* by checking your email.

NOTE: In *The Four Hour Workweek*, Timothy Ferriss specifically suggests giving yourself a major task in the morning and then checking email just before lunch. Just think how clear your head will be if you haven't yet checked your email when you start your first task in the morning.

And then, when you finally do check your email: no matter what awaits you, you'll have already completed a major task. That feels awesome!

LIVING PROACTIVELY

Applying the concept of batching may sound like turning yourself into a computer, but the outcome is the opposite—it's your best chance to live proactively. When you're constantly interrupted—especially by email— you are in a constant state of reacting to other people's needs.

By choosing when you check your email you're actually deciding what's important to you rather than letting the world decide for you. If you'd like to make an impact, on your workplace or the world, you need to provide yourself uninterrupted time.

Whether or not you rely on tools like AwayFind to help you find that time is not the point — *what's crucial is that by closing your inbox you set your own agenda.*

- Your inbox **is not** your task list
- If a message takes less than two minutes to act on, **act now**
- If a message takes longer, **place it on your task list**
- **Never leave messages** you've already read in your inbox

STEP 2

How to Clear Your Inbox

Your inbox is really no different than your physical mailbox. You probably throw out junk mail right away, place your bills in some sort of bills-to-pay pile, and toss a magazine where you're likely to read it later. *The same should go for email.*

YOUR INBOX IS NOT A TASK LIST

Do you visit the mailbox in your driveway, leaf through last year's mail, take a letter out of an envelope, skim it, put it back in the envelope, and then return it to the mailbox?

Then why would you do that with your email inbox?

The inbox is where items arrive for your examination. You need to act upon some of them today and some weeks from now; some you may need for reference and some you may have no need for. With such a potpourri of items, your inbox serves as a very inefficient task list.

With an inbox of hundreds or thousands of items, **you can't really tell what's important, what's due, what's been (sufficiently) read**.

Your inbox is really no different than your physical mailbox. You probably throw out junk mail right away, place your bills in some sort of bills-to-pay pile, and toss a magazine where you're likely to read it later. The same should go for email.

Points from emails that you'll deal with later belong on a task list, so that those emails can be safely removed from your inbox. **If you don't have a task list, you need to get one. A piece of paper will suffice for getting started.** Later I'll address some task lists I recommend.

BATCHING: HOW NOT TO CHECK YOUR EMAIL

In the last section you learned how batching works. That means two things when applied to email:

» **You need to check your email far less often; preferably once or twice per day. If you're worried about missing something time-sensitive, AwayFind can help to notify you about anything truly urgent**

» **When you do check your email, you need to go through all of it**

The rest of this section describes how to process your email the few times per day that you check it.

Experience an empty inbox as soon as possible since it'll be part of the motivation to help you succeed.

CLEARING YOUR INBOX

Okay, so let's assume you've committed the next thirty minutes to clearing your inbox. Great! Here's what to do to before you process your email:

★ Sort or filter your emails *by Subject* and then *Sender* to find email conversation threads. (Or in Gmail, this happens automatically, and in Outlook there's a "Group By Conversations" option). Then examine the messages that are part of a conversation to determine what is left for you to do with them. By looking through these at the outset, you'll often find that an issue has resolved itself by the time you're reading about it, and thus you can ignore the whole bunch of related messages (and archive those)

★ Now that the redundant messages are out of the way, process your email from oldest to newest—this way, if you have to stop you've addressed the priorities that have been waiting the longest

★ Going one message at a time, this is how you empty your inbox:

EMAIL

Less Than 2 Min?	Greater Than 2 Min?	Someone Else?	Not Relevant?
Take Action	Assign Action Item to Task List	Delegate, Assign Follow-up to Task List	

📁 ARCHIVE or 🗑 DELETE

- *If a message takes less than two minutes to act on*, **act now** and then **archive it** or **delete it**
- *If a message takes longer than two minutes to act on*, **place its actionable items on your task list** and **archive it** or **delete it**
- *If a message is for someone else who you manage*, **delegate it and place a note to follow-up on your task list**, and then **archive the message** or **delete it**
- *If a message is not relevant* and will likely never be relevant, **delete it**

A QUICK FILING TIP: USE ONE FOLDER

If you use Outlook 2007/2010, Gmail, Postbox, or Apple's Mail, filing is a piece of cake: **you only need one folder**. Anything that you're done with from your inbox should just go there. Full text search has gotten so much faster and more reliable...so you don't need to separate things by categories, projects, or clients.

- File the messages you've already looked at in one folder
- Search for the message (for text in the From, Subject, Body). Don't hunt for it. Give it a shot.

Fewer folders will make filing and retrieving messages both smoother and faster.

If you absolutely must use folders, ensure that you have fewer than a screen-worth (so you never have to scroll) and that the folders never overlap in subject matter (so you never have to think about filing a message in one

folder or another). But seriously, just use one folder and search—you've used Google ten times today, you've clearly figured out how to search.

> **NOTE:** on page 18, I talk about using filters to automatically file messages to specific folders or labels. I do recommend using separate folders—since those are places where you might check for low-priority items from time-to-time. But when archiving from the inbox, I recommend only filing to one folder, or in Gmail, simply pressing Archive.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE THOUSANDS OF EMAILS IN YOUR INBOX?

A common barrier to getting started with emptying your inbox can be the hundreds or thousands of messages that have already accumulated there. Here's how to address this:

i. Create a new folder (or "Label" if you're in Gmail) called "Email To Process"
ii. Move all the messages that arrived before this week into that folder
iii. For the next few weeks, spend 15 minutes each day processing these messages (with the same steps as above), starting from the oldest messages. (Also, continue to process your inbox each day.)

You might think that you could keep all these messages in your inbox until they've been processed, but one thing you'll recognize very quickly is the psychological relief you feel when your inbox is empty. I want you to experience an empty inbox as soon as possible since it'll be a huge motivation to push forward.

WHAT IF YOU'VE NEVER SUCCEEDED WITH A TASK LIST BEFORE?

Maintaining a list of tasks is easier said than done, but here are a few tips for keeping a task list, which will help you to succeed with processing your email:

> You'll feel much better making it through a small task list than checking two items off a giant one. You're also more likely to pay attention to your list if it's a manageable size

★ Provide enough detail on each task to make it easy for you to complete it later (When you start a task, if there's a bunch of information you have to find before you can move it forward, then you're more likely to procrastinate. You want to help yourself today by giving a clear 'next step' as the task description).

- Bad Example: "Call Paul to discuss proposal."
- Good example: "Call Paul Singh to discuss Results Junkies eBook (attached)"

★ For any given day, try to keep your task list very small (perhaps one or two major items and a few phone calls or errands). You'll feel much better making it through a small task list than checking two items off a giant one. You're also more likely to pay attention to your list if it's a manageable size.

★ If possible, maintain a list that's date specific so that you don't need to pay attention to a particular task until its start date arrives (Outlook 2007-2010's calendar Tasks are excellent for this, as is www.goodtodo.com).

★ If possible, link to the related email. Gmail has a handy "Add to Tasks" option in the "More" menu that allows you to create a task that's linked to an email. You can then re-title the task so it's clear what your action item is. If you use Gmail but don't use its Task list, you can always copy and paste the URL for the email into the task itself. Outlook also lets you link to the source email.

★ Do not use your calendar as a task list. <u>Do not use your calendar as a task list</u>. Do use your calendar to block out time for specific tasks or groups of tasks, when helpful.

> **NOTE:** For extensive discussions on using a paper to-do list, try http://snipr.com/notwwd [Web Worker Daily] or http://todoodlist.com/ ($).
>   Many more resources (such as the *Getting Things Done* book) and more to-do applications are mentioned in the Resources section at the end of this eBook.

- Turn off email notifications so you can deal with email on your own schedule
- Many messages don't need to be looked at now (or in some cases, ever), and you can set up a "filter" so those messages skip your inbox

STEP 3

Keep Out Unnecessary Interruptions

When it comes to batching email, there are two major things that can derail your best efforts:

- The constant reminder—in the form of email notifications—that emails are coming in
- The sheer volume of messages

Here's how to minimize those interruptions and vastly cut the amount of email that comes to your inbox.

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND: TURNING OFF EMAIL NOTIFICATIONS

Why Notifications Mess With Your Day

If you don't turn off your new message notifications in your email application, you'll find it hard to resist reading new messages when they arrive. Not only do notifications make it more difficult to batch your messages, just being aware of new messages can seriously impede your workflow. Here are some examples of why you shouldn't even skim a message until you're fully ready to deal with it:

- An email could completely change your state of mind (emotionally-charged news will wreck any chance of getting back to what you're doing right now)
- An email could make you lose your flow (even minor messages can make you lose your train of thought)

- An email with a "quick solution" could send you into a rabbit hole (and the only "quick" thing about it ends up being how fast 30 minutes went by)
- Always responding to messages right away creates an unrealistic expectation about your availability (which is hard to maintain and ultimately puts you at a disadvantage). *Train your contacts to respect your time!*

AwayFind: for the Time-Sensitive Stuff

You may be reading this book because you signed up for AwayFind. AwayFind monitors your inbox for anything urgent . And if others need to reach you with their urgent messages they can use your AwayFind Contact Form.

If something important comes up while you're not checking email, AwayFind will send you a text message, call you, push an alert to your iPhone/Android, or even delegate the message to someone else.

If you didn't come across this book through AwayFind, you can sign up for free. I'm biased in recommending AwayFind since I created it, but I built it to address the primary need I saw in my eight years as a productivity trainer.

Turning Off Email Notifications

If you're wondering how to turn off new message notifications for your email application, here are the instructions for some popular applications.

Use AwayFind to limit constant email interruptions. Close your inbox and get mobile alerts just for what matters now.

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OUTLOOK 2007

i.   Select the **Tools** menu and choose **Options**…

ii. Click the **E-mail Options**… button

iii. Click **Advanced E-mail Options**…

iv. In the **When new items arrive in my inbox** area, uncheck all the checkboxes (no sounds, no notifications, no alerts!)

v.   Close out of all of these windows

> **NOTE:** If you feel you may be accessing Outlook while you're not checking email, I would highly recommend setting your Outlook to no longer check for email automatically. Don't worry, you won't forget to check your email.
>
> If you're on Microsoft Exchange, just select **File** and choose **Work Offline**. (Then **Work Online** when you want to check email.) If you're not on Exchange, select **Tools ▶ Options**, **Mail Setup**, **Send**/**Receive**, and uncheck **Schedule an automatic send/receive every ___**.

OUTLOOK 2010

i.   Select the **File** menu and choose **Options**

ii. In the left area that lists the various categories, choose **Mail**

iii. In the **Message Arrival** section, beneath **When new items arrive in my inbox**, uncheck all the checkboxes (no sounds, no notifications, no alerts!)

iv. Close out of all of these windows

> **NOTE:** If you feel you may be accessing Outlook while you're not checking email, I would highly recommend setting your Outlook to no longer check for email automatically. Don't worry, you won't forget to check your email.
>
> If you're on Microsoft Exchange, just select **File** and choose **Work Offline**. (Then **Work Online** when you want to check email. For more, visit this link: http://bit.ly/outlookoffline) If you're not on Exchange, select **File ▶ Options**, **Advanced**, **Send**/**Receive**, and uncheck **Schedule an automatic send/receive every ___**.

THUNDERBIRD

There are three ways to resolve email notifications in Thunderbird:

- Simply turn off Thunderbird when you're not checking email
- You can change the interval by which Thunderbird checks email to 200 minutes (or another number of your choice). This setting is found in **Tools ▶ Account Settings ▶ <account name> ▶ Server Settings** in **Check for new messages every __ minutes**
- If you don't wish to display the notification icon, you can configure Windows XP or Windows Vista to hide the new mail notification icon in the system tray / notifications area. You can read more about this here: http://snipr.com/notmozilla [Mozilla Knowledgebase]

APPLE MAIL

i. Select the **Mail** menu and choose **Preferences**

ii. Click the **General** area from the menu bar on the top

iii. For **New mail sound**, choose **None** (and close the window)

> **NOTE:** If you may be accessing Mail while you're not checking email, it would also be wise to set Mail to no longer check for email automatically. Don't worry, you won't forget to check your email.
> Just change the option for **Check for new mail** to **Manually**.

BLACKBERRY

i. Select **Profiles**

ii. Select the active profile and click **Edit**

iii. Select **Messages**

iv. Change the volume to mute and turn off the LED repeat notification if you'd like

v. **Save** when exiting the profile

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iPHONE

i. Click the **Settings** application

ii. Select **Sounds**

iii. Change **New Email** to **None**

ANDROID

i. Select the **Gmail** application

ii. Press the **Menu** button and then select **Settings**

iii. Uncheck **Email notifications** (and any other options that may be available in your version of Android, such as **Notify Once**)

WINDOWS PHONE 7

i. From **Settings**,

ii. Select **ringtones+sounds**

iii. For **New email**, select **none**

TURNING OFF EMAIL NOTIFICATIONS FOR WEBMAIL (GMAIL, YAHOO!, ETC.)

You don't have to worry about turning off notifications if you use webmail. Just keep your webmail closed when you're not batching your email.

REDUCING THE VOLUME OF EMAIL IN YOUR INBOX: FILTERS

What's a Filter?

Turning off your email notifications will make it easier to dedicate specific time to batching. The next step is reducing the number of messages waiting for you when you do open your inbox. Filters can help you do that.

A few well-designed filters **can save you time and help you to focus** on more important messages.

An email Filter (or Rule) is a set of conditions that your email application looks for, and then does something about. Perhaps it looks for a subject or email address in new messages, and then moves those messages to a folder related to that topic or sender.

For example, maybe all messages that you get from a mailing list "Art Director's Club" should go to the "Art Director's Club" folder to be examined later. You could do this yourself, or you could ask your email application to look for "members@artdirectorsclub.com" in the To field of your new email messages, and then automatically move them to the Art Director's Club folder without ever appearing in the inbox. When the computer does this automatically, it is processing a Filter or Rule.

Using Filters to Manage Emails that Don't Require Immediate Action

When you get lots of email, it can be daunting to batch it in one sitting. But you don't need to act on many of those messages, at least not right now. Much of that email clutters your inbox, distracts your attention, and takes time out of your day.
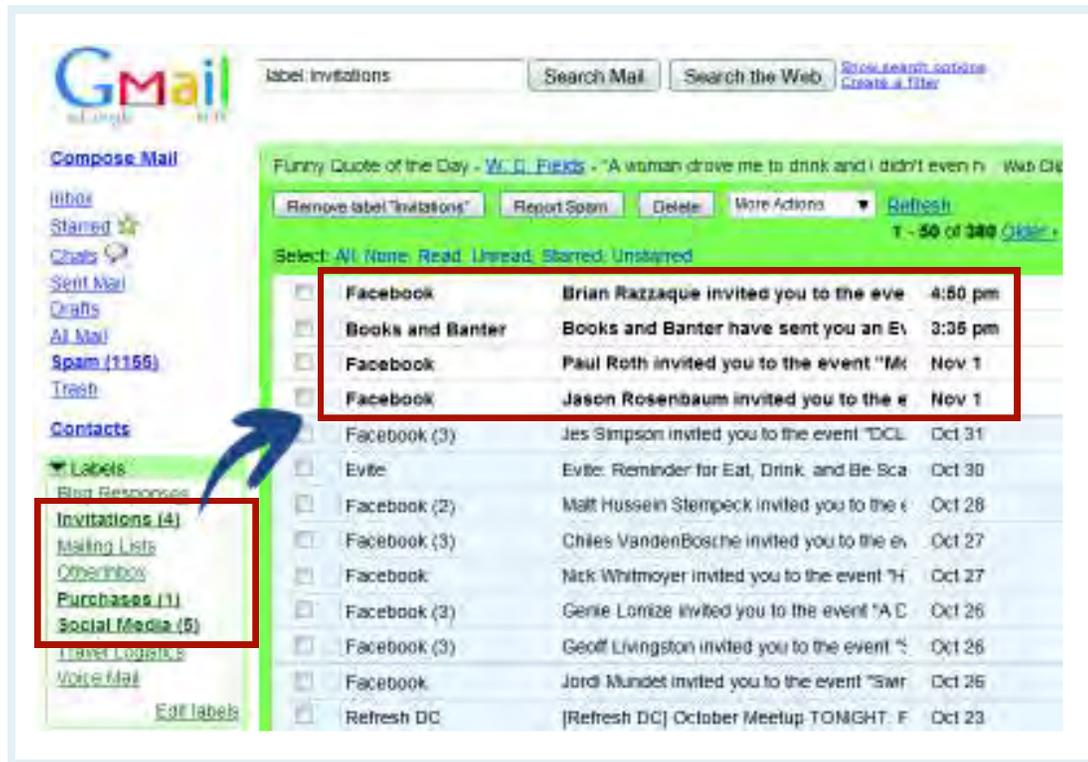
I'm not referring to spam—that's a different topic that can be addressed with other solutions. I'm referring to newsletters, shipment notifications, friend requests, event invitations, general company mailings—anything that you might want to look at, but can most likely wait a few days.

Here are some examples of messages that I filter; I want to be aware of these and able to skim them at my convenience but don't need to read them right away:

You can see in my Gmail account's Labels area how these filters behave: there are now invitations, purchase receipts, and social media activities that I can read through when I have time. Here are four invitations from the last couple days that I can now process, with my calendar open, all at once.

★ All online purchase notifications go to a Purchases folder

★ All recurring statements go to a Purchases folder

★ Anything resembling a newsletter or mailing list goes to a Mailing List folder

★ All Facebook, Evite, Eventbrite, Plancast, and similar invitations go to an Invitations folder

In other words, anything that you don't need to look at right away and/or anything that you regularly file to a particular place (or delete) is perfect for a filter. The folder where they move to will darken, and you can just process that later (monthly or whenever).

Getting Started with Filters

Starting today, whenever you get an email, think carefully about whether it's personally relevant/actionable. If it's not, then don't just file it away. Instead:

- Unsubscribe from that mailer if it's a legitimate mailing in which you're just not interested anymore; or,
- Create a filter to prevent that type of email from ever reaching your inbox again

Be ruthless. Anything resembling a newsletter or automatic notification is not worthy of your immediate attention. Anything that's not sent directly to you with personal information is likely something you can deal with another time.

Rather than trying to go through old messages and create filters for them all at once, spend 30 seconds to create a new filter when the need arises. Just ask yourself every time you're about to delete or file a message: *will I be doing this again*? If the answer is yes, then create a filter.

> **NOTE:** while processing your email, if you receive an email that's really timely, you can use AwayFind for Outlook or Gmail and click one button so you're now alerted when that sender emails again or the topic is updated. You can even set those alerts to expire.

How to Create a Filter

Each email application has different instructions for how to create a filter. I've recorded videos for how to create filters in Gmail and Outlook here:

http://snipr.com/notfilters [Technotheory]

Be ruthless. Anything that's not sent directly to you with personal information is likely something you can deal with another time.

You can read some more tutorials here, as well:

- Microsoft's Guide to Rules [Microsoft Office Online]:
  http://snipr.com/notoffice (2003)
  http://bit.ly/outlook2007rules (2007)
  http://bit.ly/outlook2010rules (2010)
- Gmail's Guide to Filters [Gmail Support]:
  http://bit.ly/gmailfilters
- Thunderbird's Guide to Filters [Mozilla Knowledgebase]:
  http://snipr.com/nottfilters
- An unofficial Apple Mail Guide to Rules [macs.about.com]:
  http://snipr.com/notarule

DO YOU USE FACEBOOK, LINKEDIN, OR TWITTER?

With five minutes of tweaks to your social networking sites, you can stop them from sending you unnecessary emails, but still receive relevant messages from your friends. I've put up videos for exactly how to do this at:

http://snipr.com/notsocialnetworks [Technotheory]

FEWER MESSAGES AND FEWER INTERRUPTIONS

By turning on filters and unsubscribing from many of your mailings, you'll soon have far fewer messages arriving in your inbox. After a few weeks, you won't have to create many more filters. By then you'll also have learned that it takes less than a minute to configure a filter, so creating a new one from time to time won't be much work.

By turning off notifications, you'll be able to focus on real work without distraction. This will not only make batching your email easier, but you'll do a much better job on your other tasks, as you'll have more focus.

As a by-product of both of these techniques, your email inbox will look completely different: nearly all of your messages will be either actionable or personal. You'll have a more accurate picture of how much you really have to do (since more of your inbox messages will be relevant), and you'll have much more attention to give to the rest of your tasks.

Conclusions

> The biggest challenge here, no doubt, is learning to spend time away from email. **Once you can get away from your inbox, you'll be astounded at how much you can accomplish.**

THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

David Allen commonly refers to the practices in his *Getting Things Done* book as "advanced common sense." I hope you'll find that most of the ideas above are more evolutionary than revolutionary, and that they're ultimately just a few practical tips to get you on the road to better productivity.

The biggest challenge here, no doubt, is learning to spend time away from email. But once you can get away from your inbox, you'll be astounded at how much you can accomplish. Several years ago I decided to stop checking my email until just before lunch. WOW—now I get something major accomplished every morning! Truly, it was life-changing, and you can do it, too.

THANK YOU, AND A LITTLE BIT OF CONTEXT

I originally wrote this as a companion to AwayFind, the company I started with the purpose of freeing people from the chain of email. But I hope that these tips and techniques, with or without AwayFind, can get you a much better handle on email.

What matters most to me is that this all helps you to find time to do more interesting things. Maybe even to escape from your computer or smartphone. If you have a story to share, suggestions, or comments, I welcome them at jared@awayfind.com.

Cheers,

Jared Goralnick,
San Francisco, CA

Author's Notes

MY EXPERIENCE WITH EMAIL PRODUCTIVITY

I ran a small business focused on software efficiency training since from 2002-2010, which I sold in order to focus on AwayFind. I have studied, provided training on, and implemented many approaches to managing email for clients like the FBI, HP, and NTT/DoCoMo. I've presented internationally (SXSW, Web 2.0, Le Web, hundreds of others) and co-founded one of the largest conferences on email, Inbox Love. You can read more at my blog, technotheory.com, or on Twitter (@technotheory).

I hope you can learn from my experiences, but everyone is different. Please adapt these ideas however they work best for you. If we can start to respect each other's time a little bit more with regard to the emails we send, we'll all be better off.

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Many of the ideas within this book are frequently discussed in personal productivity literature and on personal productivity blogs. While I often apply my own spin, many others are responsible for the core ideas. To help you better understand where this advice fits into the context of others' ideas, see the next section for further reading.

Additional Resources

WORKS CITED

★ Basex, *The Cost of Not Paying Attention: How Interruptions Impact Knowledge Worker Productivity*. September 2005. http://bsx.stores.yahoo.net/coofnotpaat.html

★ The Radicati Group, *E-mail and Collaboration Corporate Survey, 2006 – 2007*. September 2006.

★ Richtel, Matt. *"Lost in E-Mail, Tech Firms Face Self-Made Beast."* June 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/14/technology/14email.html

★ Sierra, Kathy. *"Is Twitter TOO good?" Creating Passionate Users.* March 2007. http://headrush.typepad.com/creating_passionate_users/2007/03/is_twitter_too_.html

In Sierra's quote, she also cited two other documents:

- Ross, Philip E. *"The Expert Mind." Scientific American.* July 2006. http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=the-expert-mind
- Sierra, Kathy. *"How to be an Expert." Creating Passionate Users.* March 2006. http://headrush.typepad.com/creating_passionate_users/2006/03/how_to_be_an_ex.html

FURTHER READING

★ **Technotheory.com** – This is my blog, where I talk about productivity, email, and happiness. You can subscribe at http://technotheory.com/feed [free]

★ *The Four Hour Workweek* – This book by Timothy Ferriss really helped me to focus on how I used my time, both for productivity and for my overall happiness. It's packed full of concise tips and inspirational ideas. http://snipr.com/4hwweb [Amazon, ~$14]

★ *You Are Not Your Inbox* – This audiobook by Stever Robbins (the "Get it Done Guy") offers numerous in-depth techniques for going through your email. For the seriously overloaded, this funny but insightful listen will offer real solutions. http://www.youarenotyourinbox.com [$47]

★ *Getting Things Done* – This book by David Allen is a comprehensive and all-inclusive method for organizing your life. A web search for "GTD" will show you that few other books have as many dedicated and creative fans. It's an easy read and, even if you don't take all of its lessons, it will help anyone to pursue their ambitions without losing track of the small stuff. http://snipr.com/gtdweb [Amazon, ~$10]

★ **Inbox Zero** – This mini-website by Merlin Mann of 43folders cuts right to the chase for how to process your email. It's fun and fast, and the basis for many of the ideas here. You can read it (http://43folders.com/izero), watch a video of a related presentation by Merlin delivered to Google (http://snipr.com/izvid [Google Video]), or download the MP3 of that presentation (http://snipr.com/izmp3 [Odeo]). [free]

EMAIL PRODUCTIVITY PRODUCTS I USE

I use the following products on a regular basis. All of them help with my email productivity, have free versions, and do not require a particular operating system or email provider.

★ **Postbox -** Postbox is a Mac/Windows email client that's lighter and simpler than Outlook. It has great offline support and deep Gmail integration. I use it mostly because of the many email accounts I have and because it's excellent on long flights and in locations with spotty internet access. http://www.postbox-inc.com/

★ **The Email Game -** Sometimes it's difficult to plow through your inbox in one sitting. The Email Game forces me to focus, one message at a time, and get through everything. http://emailga.me

★ **AwayFind** – AwayFind is designed to complement the methods in this eBook… or, more specifically, to really help people to spend less time in their inbox but be more responsive to those who matter most. Check it out at http://www.awayfind.com