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Productivity Hacks: I Empty My Inbox Every Day



This post is part of a series in which LinkedIn Influencers share their secrets to being more productive. [See all their #productivityhacks here.](#)

Google says there are 145 million [tricks and tips for transforming your email](#) into a productivity powerhouse. That's one suggestion for every [1,000 emails sent worldwide every day](#).

Email is unidirectional—anyone, at any time, can just go to your inbox without permission, invitation or consideration. Empowering the world to demand a thin slice of your attention is more than unfair—it's a recipe for constant distraction. These are my rules for taking back control, and my undivided attention.



It boils down to this: **my inbox is empty every night**. Not possible? Consider that I receive thousands of emails every day—from colleagues, industry peers, the press, vendors, clients and acquaintances.

You can get to zero too.

Rule No. 1: Unsubscribe. Most people sign up for newsletters with the best of intentions. But there is no way you can read every product update, sales announcement or latest happening from your vendors. Unsubscribing takes a little more time than deleting, but it will save you hours every year. Think what you can do with that newfound freedom. If the sheer number of mailing lists in your inbox means you'll be unsubscribing for weeks on end, at least try [Unroll Me](#), which will automatically combine all of your email subscriptions into one daily digest.

Rule No. 2: Delete with a vengeance. When in doubt, delete. If it's that important, someone will follow up with you. Respond to what you can and move the rest to recycling. To avoid deleting emails from truly important senders—like your parents, or kids, or boss—assign them a unique color or set up a similar email rule that lets you know at a glance which messages are most likely to be critical.

Rule No. 3: Filing is for suckers. Manual filing consumes hours of time in the analog world. Why recreate it digitally? A good search tool, either built in to your email system or through an app like [CloudMagic](#), can scan your folders and find whatever it is you need instantly. To keep everything in one place, respond to pertinent messages so they're automatically saved in your sent file (eliminating search across multiple folders). I rely on the power of a quick "thx." The reader knows I've read what they've sent, and their message is automatically captured into the one email folder I use for future reference.

If you do nothing else but these three things, your inbox will be a lot leaner. Whatever messages are left become a to-do list of the items that actually need your care and attention. [Keep this list short](#), between 2 and 5 items, or what you can actually hope to achieve on any given day. Get those items done and you've just reached Inbox Zero*.

Incoming email is half the battle; being a better email sender can increase your efficiency too.

Rule No. 4: Bolster Your Subject Lines. David Ogilvy knew the power of a great headline: *"On the average, five times as many people read the headline as read the body copy. When you have written your headline, you have spent eighty cents out of your dollar."*

Why waste valuable real estate with lines like, "Please read," "Follow up," "Checking in," or worse ... writing nothing at all. Tell me what you're emailing me about, or what you need, and I'm much more likely to spare you from the delete key.

Rule No. 5: Be polite, not formal. Who writes "dear" anymore anyway, unless they're writing to their mother? All the niceties of the letter-writing days don't need to carry over into email. A message isn't breaking new ground; ideally, it's solidifying communications you've already started



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offline. Don't waste time with stiff, formal notes. Fire off what you mean to say and wait for the "thx" to come rolling in.

Rule No. 6: Keep it brief. There is nothing more annoying than a long, rambling, detail-stuffed email that ends with "Thoughts?" These get deleted first. If your message is more than a few sentences, it probably needs to be an in-person conversation, or at the very least a phone call. Get to the point and have a call to action. Train your colleagues to do the same. You'll all be happier and more productive for it.

** Merlin Mann has popularized the idea of Inbox Zero, and detailed his methods for regaining time and productivity by breaking email's grip. While I came to these rules on my own, there's a lot of sound advice over on his blog, 43folders.com. It's definitely worth checking out.*

Photo: bluebloodbkk/Shutterstock.com.