



# talking about...

March 2008

... *designing better relationships for better outcomes*

## Reducing That Inbox

*"There is a profound difference between information and meaning."*

... Warren Bennis (1925 - ) US educator, futurologist, advisor, writer

This month, we would like to make a short diversion from our recent articles on leadership to talk about a recurring theme in today's work place – e-mail.

Without a doubt, email is now seen as one of our principal communication tools. However, it seems that we can have too much of a good thing and it appears that a great many people feel they get too much e-mail. It is not unusual for someone to receive more than a hundred e-mails a day. Even if only ten of those e-mails require action, the other ninety e-mails will take time to deal with. If you only allow thirty seconds to examine each e-mail to see whether it requires your attention, this adds up to 45 minutes to filter your e-mails before you begin working on those that need your attention. The complaint is generally that this time could be used for other things.

To hear most people talk about their inbox it would appear they feel there is little they can do to easily manage the amount of e-mail they receive and the impact this has on their day to day activity. Even though mail filters can help reduce unwanted junk mail, they do not help with filtering more legitimate e-mails. As most e-mail comes from people we interact with regularly, this requires some human interaction to establish a shared understanding and commitment to how e-mail is used with those who send it to us regularly.

Here are some thoughts on how you could reduce the amount of e-mail you receive and how you can better deal with those you do receive.

**Establish a shared understanding and commitment with others as to when to use e-mail with you.** For example, e-mail is a great means of sharing information but not such a great way of gaining commitment – this is better done through face to face or telephone interactions where you have more appreciation of how the other person responds and can adjust your conversation accordingly. Things you might like to consider here are:

- 🕒 What information is important to you and what is not important. This can be in general terms and project specific and is an ongoing conversation to be had as requirements change with time;
- 🕒 Gain a clear commitment from others (and make clear commitments yourself) about what they will do when sending e-mail to you and then hold them to that commitment. This is an ongoing process as you are dealing with people's habits (including your own) of dealing with e-mail. Don't be disheartened if people forget their agreement – simply keep going back and reinforcing their commitment and what that means;

- 🕒 A shared understanding of expectations if you are sent the e-mail directly or sent it as a copy - people often feel the need to copy others into e-mails as a means of protecting themselves or because they are uncertain of what others want to know and it is easier and safer to assume they want to know;
- 🕒 E-mail can be more easily managed if people have a common understanding of how to identify e-mail. The subject line can be very useful here. For example, you could include "Reply requested by time Y" or "Action requested by time Y" in the subject line as a means of helping people recognise e-mails that require them to take some action.

There are undoubtedly many more opportunities to reduce the time you spend dealing with your e-mail inbox, the key to addressing this lies in the conversations you have with others not just in technology.

*"Despite the continuing expansion or even explosion of information, there will forever be limits beyond which the devices of science cannot lead a man."*

... June Singer (1918 - ) US doctor

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## The Beauty of Growing Old ...

*Something for us to look forward to as we grow older...*

Just before the funeral services, the undertaker came up to the very elderly widow and asked, "How old was your husband?" "98," she replied. "Two years older than me" "So you're 96," the undertaker commented. She responded, "Hardly worth going home, is it?"

Reporters interviewing a 104-year-old woman: "And what do you think is the best thing about being 104?" the reporter asked. She simply replied, "No peer pressure."

I've sure gotten old!  
I've had two bypass surgeries, a hip replacement, new knees, fought prostate cancer and diabetes, I'm half blind, can't hear anything quieter than a jet engine, take 40 different medications that make me dizzy, winded, and subject to blackouts.  
Have bouts with dementia.  
Have poor circulation; hardly feel my hands and feet anymore.  
I can't remember if I'm 85 or 92.  
I have lost all my friends. But, thank God, I still have my driver's license.

I feel like my body has gotten totally out of shape, so I got my doctor's permission to join a fitness club and start exercising. I decided to take an aerobics class for seniors. I bent, twisted, gyrated, jumped up and down, and perspired for an hour. But, by the time I got my leotards on, the class was over.

An elderly woman decided to prepare her will and told her preacher she had two final requests. First, she wanted to be cremated, and second, she wanted her ashes scattered over Coles Supermarket. "Coles?" the preacher exclaimed. "Why Coles?" "Then I'll be sure my daughters visit me twice a week"

My memory's not as sharp as it used to be. Also, my memory's not as sharp as it used to be.

Know how to prevent sagging? Just eat till the wrinkles fill out.

It's scary when you start making the same noises as your coffee maker.

These days about half the stuff in my shopping cart says, "For fast relief."

### THE SENILITY PRAYER

Grant me the senility to forget the people  
I never liked anyway,  
The good fortune to run into the ones I do; and  
The eyesight to tell the difference.

And always remember this ...  
You don't stop laughing because you grow old,  
You grow old because you stop laughing.

***"I like who I am now. Other people may not. I'm comfortable. I feel freer now. I don't want growing older to matter to me."***

... Meryl Streep (1949 - ) US actress

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