



Lightening the overload

TIPS TO MANAGE YOUR EMAIL INBOX

There's nothing like spending a week cleaning out your office files to make you realize you keep too much stuff.

That's what I learned when CAALA moved into brand new offices and I had to go through 12 years of files and decide what to keep and what to toss. I quickly realized moving unneeded paper into the new office made no sense, so my rule was any files I hadn't looked at in a year went straight to the shredder.

Cleaning out file drawers can literally be a pain in your neck, but it's easy compared to the daunting task of cleaning out your email inbox. I can't help you purge your old paper files, but as we begin a New Year, I can give some advice about how to clean out your email inbox.

These will be tips from experts, and if you look at my email inbox you'll see I'm definitely not an expert on managing my inbox.

Cleaning out emails is harder than paper files because of the adage "out of sight, out of mind." Paper files are right there in plain sight; electronic files are hidden deep inside your computer, or even worse, somewhere in the cloud.

Martin Webster, Peggy Duncan and Celestine Chua are email management and business productivity experts. These are recommendations from them that Peggy included in an article on [Vogue.com](#), Martin wrote at [leadershipthoughts.com](#) and Celestine wrote in her blog [personalexcellence.com](#).

Here are some of their tips that might help you get out from under that mountain of old emails.

The first steps to clearing out your inbox are to learn how to manage your emails in the first place.

Keep it short

This is great advice, especially for trial lawyers who believe that the more words they use in an email, the better the email. Both Duncan and Chua say you

should start by writing concise emails. Brevity is underrated in our attention-starved world, but you can control your time and attention by learning to be brief and precise. Keep it short while covering what's needed, then move on. Duncan recommends being brief in emails but clear on specific information and deadlines you'd like the recipient to acknowledge. Consider bulleted lists and bold text, like due dates, to help capture the reader's attention. If the email was sent to you, always reply, but keep it short. Answer with one or two words i.e., "Received" or "Got it."

Don't reply

Many emails are informational and don't require you to respond. If that's true, then reduce clutter and don't respond. You're not being rude, you're actually helping the sender reduce their clutter. If you are on the CC line, there's no reason to reply. If you have nothing to add and you're not required to reply, don't.

Opt out

Reduce clutter by preventing unwanted emails from entering your inbox in the first place. Unsubscribe from stuff you don't need or want. Instead of just deleting unwanted emails, take the time to scroll to the end and click "Unsubscribe." You can also turn off unwanted notifications. We get countless notifications from companies to attract our attention to their services. Use a service when you want to use it, not when it notifies you. Turn them off.

You will feel liberated when your inbox is a fraction of the size it used to be. I know that this is easier said than done. Here are some tips about how to easily reduce the size of your inbox.

Create folders

Get in the habit of creating folders for emails from specific people such as your boss, a co-worker or a client. Have

their emails go directly to the folder. You can also select certain recurring words from the subject line. You can also create a folder and manually move emails to it. This will reduce the number of emails in your inbox.

Copy first

Begin by following a tip that will let you delete unwanted emails without feeling anxious. Create a new folder: Copy Inbox. Then create a rule so that every email you receive is copied to the Copy Inbox folder. You then have a copy of every message you received. This lets you follow the next two tips without feeling nervous that you deleted something important.

Sort and delete

Use your filter or sort feature and scan your emails by sender. Don't open any message. By sorting them you can now easily identify messages that aren't relevant to your work, are from unknown senders or are of no interest to you. Highlight them and click delete. Do the same by sorting by subject. Highlight the ones you don't want and click delete. An example is those annoying out-of-office messages. Delete them all. Remember, you still have a copy of every message in your Copy Inbox folder.

Oldest out

Sort your emails by date and select every message that's more than one month old. Don't bother reading them, simply click delete. You can assume if it was important the sender would have been in touch already or you would have already taken action.

I succeeded in cleaning out my paper files; now it's time to manage my email inbox. I hope this column lets you do the same.

