

Stop Doing email...

First Thing in The Morning

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Mark Friedler, CEO of Gigex, the leading Internet launch, distribution and fulfillment ASP for game demos, video and software, has forbidden everyone in his organization from opening Outlook the first 15 minutes in the morning. And that was just his first move! More from Friedler later.

Email is killing focus and effectiveness. Whether you get 20 or 200, there are always those emails that drag you into others' priorities. Although there is an initial "feel good" effect, blowing through a bunch of emails is the wrong way to start the day. Instead, decide the most important thing you need to accomplish today to accelerate your organization – a "theme" for the day" -- and do it the first 15 to 30 minutes! Then feel free to do email, fight fires, and enjoy the challenges of running a business.

The evidence is clear. The root cause of stress is unfinished business – and nothing feels worse than going all day knowing you're not doing the most important thing. I used to get up and go down to my home office before the kids got up and jump right into email. Inevitably there was an email or two (or my online New York Times!) that sucked me into the vortex of trivia. Before I knew it, the kids were up, I was heading to my office, and the rat race began, with the day ending with a sense that I didn't really get anything vitally important accomplished.

Instead, thousands of CEOs that I've shared this with have reported back that their effectiveness has skyrocketed since they started bypassing email first thing and instead started their day laser focused on the one thing that will drive their business to the next level. In my own experience, I'm so much more relaxed the rest of the day knowing I accomplished a great deal in the first 30 minutes.

Surgeons require a focused time each day without interruption. You need the same surgery time. If it's truly urgent and can't wait 30 minutes instruct your team to give you a call. For me, my 30 minutes is at 6am in the morning – rarely is anything urgent at that hour!

Friedler and others are proactively managing email within their firms. Here was an excerpt from Friedler's email to me after taking control of email in his company:

Verne,

I wanted to share with you Gigex's experiences implementing this strategy. First, Gigex is a "high twitch" company specializing in marketing video games so our industry is very fast moving and deals happen, change and progress very quickly.

That being said, I bought everyone (including myself) a white board. We all write our top 5 goals down and focus on 1 each morning. Everyone is forbidden from opening Outlook for the first 15 minutes of the day then opening it at 4 scheduled times during the day. (I also rethought my idea of buying a Blackberry - I have decided not to after trying this strategy). I felt the power of this strategy last week when I was out of the office in NY. I sent out my emails the previous evening and at predetermined times, got my email. I did a quick sort: 1) Eliminating junk, jokes

and any unimportant emails, 2) Placing non urgent mails in folders to be replied to later and finally 3) Checking into deadline tasks or urgent inbound requests.

The breakthrough for me - and shared by my company - was the shift from REACTIVE to PROACTIVE email management. Now we were in control of our time and agenda. I knew going in that I would spend no more than 15 minutes with it and I could then focus on other ongoing projects instead of reacting to the little Outlook chime. It has been very liberating. Also let me add that I have focused more on giving time deadlines to outbound messages, i.e. "please let me know by Wed at 5pm if this meeting is confirmed." I then know to expect replies at certain times. My employees share my enthusiasm over their new surplus of "found time" and feel more in control of their schedule.

Thanks, Mark

To read what other executives are doing to rescue their lives from email, go to www.gazelles.com.
Happy New Year!

The "Growth Guy"