Organizing Tips...

Got the Email Blues?

- By Lorena Prime -

Who doesn't have the Email blues?! Email is great for communicating, but it can also be counter-productive. Ever lose track of time answering emails? This means that your inbox is controlling you, rather than you controlling it. Here are some ways to manage email more effectively.

- **Don't use your inbox as a to-do list.** If you read and *re*read each email in your inbox, you'll find that you're re-reading each one 15-20 times. That's wasted time! Instead, read emails once and decide what to do with them using the TAR principle (see TAR below).

- **Create folders (or labels in gmail).** Use folders on the left-hand side to keep the number of emails in your inbox to a minimum. This also organizes them so you can easily find them later. Use folders for both reference and action emails. Separate these two types by naming the reference folders starting with a "z_" and the action folders with an "_". Using this naming standard, email software will sort action folders at the top for easy access and reference folders at the bottom.

- **Use T.A.R.** Every email falls into one of three categories - Trash, Action, or Reference. For each incoming email, ask yourself "Can I delete it?" If so, delete it! If you need to keep it, ask "Is some action required?" If no action is needed, then the email is reference only – drag it to one of your reference folders on the left-hand side. If it's an action email, ask yourself "What's the next action step?" After determining the next step, write that step in your planner or on your to-do list and drag the email to one of your action folders on the left-hand side.

- **Use Rules.** Rules put your email on autopilot so that you don't have to review every incoming email. Rules are perfect for emails that you want to read at some point, just not right now – news-letters, sales, jokes, etc... For example, if you receive a newsletter from an industry association, set up a rule specifying all newsletters from that particular association automatically go to your "Newsletters" folder. Then on Friday afternoon, when it's slow in the office, catch up on industry news.

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- **Clean out your inbox weekly (if not daily).** This is possible if you're using file folders, rules, and the TAR principle. These tips will make reviewing emails much easier and faster, and your inbox will be clean and will decrease that overwhelmed feeling.

- **Send fewer emails.** If you want to receive fewer emails, then send fewer emails.

- **Limit time answering emails.** Set a timer or use the clock on your computer. We get lost checking emails so having a set time, such as 20 minutes, will help you automatically prioritize which emails to review first.

- **Use email as a productivity tool.** When using Microsoft Outlook, make sure to use the calendar, contacts, and tasks functions. These help organize information as well as your time, so you'll be more productive. (Not sure how to use these features? Then take our "Working Smart with Outlook" class and learn how.)

Lorena Prime, Owner of Clearly Organized, uses a 5-stage process to help people shorten routine office work and save 1-2 hours every day. What could you do with an extra 1-2 hours? For more information, visit www.ClearlyOrganizedLife.com or call 617-633-2199.