

How do you react when you hear the "ding" on your laptop, tablet or phone? When you see the little pop-up on your screen? Is your first response to jump on the message? Does it seemingly cry out "respond to me... respond to me...". If so, it's time to take the control back!!

1. Ask yourself this, "Do I really need every email account I own on my mobile device?" Two of my email accounts alert to my phone - the others can wait.
2. The phrase "inside voice" can now be "inside alerts" - turn your alerts off between 7 pm & 5 am. Let the super important people know and give them an alternative way to reach you during an emergency.
3. Take the email time-out challenge. Turn off all email pop-up alerts, set a timer for 20 minutes, and complete your task with no distractions! Wow, did you realize how distracting the email alerts were?
4. Set your spam and security alerts to the highest setting. The unsubscribe link at the bottom of certain emails is there for a reason - use it.
5. Set up folders within your email account, creating easy to find emails and an organized space.
6. Learn about rules and implement them. I remember the day my co-worker shared this amazing trick of setting up a rule to have certain emails automatically go into a folder!! WOW you would of thought I won the lottery - the organizing lottery. Every email program (Outlook, Apple Mail) or system (Yahoo, Gmail, AOL, etc.) will be a little different, but the time spent learning how to implement rules on your messages is a great investment of your time.
7. Block out certain times during your day to answer emails if your business allows.
8. Use the "auto-reply" function, letting senders know when you will be away from your desk for extended amounts of time - training days, vacations, etc. This reduces the amount of follow-up emails to see if you received the previous email and shows you are courteous and professional.

9. Set up a separate email account for magazine subscriptions, weekly newsletters, catalogs, daily blogs etc. Put the fun stuff you like to read into that account, and minimize the distraction.
10. When sending or responding to emails, make sure your subject lines are clear and concise. On responses, change them if necessary to ensure you understand what the email chain is about when the next response comes back.
11. When sending an email to a large group, use the BCC (blind copy) function. This will eliminate the back-and-forth responses between members of the group, and cut down on the clutter in your inbox.
12. Pick up the phone or hand-write a card once in a while. It won't kill you!

Communicating through email helps eliminate missed calls, short pleasantries, and general chit-chat saves time. However, the constant attachment to our electronic devices can be distracting to our productivity and create distance from those who surround us in our daily lives. Try to schedule your daily electronic "time out" - I promise the shock won't last.