MSU Leadership Institute on Prioritizing and Time/Email Management

March 14, 2018

Lucinda D. Davenport, Ph.D.

*Email has become a kind of digital water torture for the scholar struggling to think without interruption.*

– Cal Newport

**Emails pile up because they –**

• expect rapid responses and then you get another rapid response;

• are invitations to meetings and prompt emails from everyone comparing calendars;

• copy everyone and then those people respond with copies to everyone;

• request you forward email to others;

• are administrative tasks.

**Factoids**

• The average worker receives about 125 emails a day.

• Then there are those you send.

• Then it takes about a minute or more after the email interruption to get back into what you were doing…to rediscover your train of thought before the interruption. So, figure about 125 minutes a day or about 2 hours not concentrating.

• Then stress narrows attention and soon we are just trying to get simple tasks done to feel a sense of accomplishment, but they are not necessarily the ones that we were hired to do.

**Importantly, your cognition to focus and concentrate is interrupted.**

(The “h” key.)

**Result . . .**

When managers and faculty are overloaded by email, they scaling back on leadership and other thinking behaviors. They work on projects that require focus at night and on weekends and outside of the office.

In 2014, the average professor spent about 60 hours/week working and 30% of that time on emails and meetings . . . and that time has increased in the past 5 years.

**Some suggestions**

• Pause your inbox or turn off notifications so you won’t be distracted for at least 90 minutes because this is the amount on time it takes to get back into a flow.

• Set a schedule of X number of times a day to have email delivered.

**Other suggestions**

• Use a meaningful subject line for organizing and finding emails later.

• Avoid the “Reply to All” when replying, to cut down on emails unless necessary.

• Use the BBC field when sending, to cut down on emails unless necessary.

• Keep the email thread for efficiency instead of having to find separate related emails.

• Read your email before sending it, to avoid emails concerning misunderstandings.

**Thank you to:**

• Vozza, S. (10-22-18) “2 Minute Read,” who summarized research by MSU management professor Russ Johnson published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* <https://www.fastcompany.com/90249763/how-your-email-habits-might-be-making-you-a-worse-boss>

• Newport, S. (2-12-19) Is Email Making Professors Stupid? *The Chronicle of Higher Education* <https://www.chronicle.com/interactives/is-email-making-professors-stupid>

• 23 Rules for Corporate Email Etiquette <https://www.advantage-positioning.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/23_Rules_of_Corporate_Email_Etiquette.pdf>