

Before You Click 'Delete'

The whys and wherefores of virtual spring cleaning

So first of all, let me 'fess up that today's topic is as much catharsis for me as it might be for you.

Confession: I subscribe to stuff I never intend to read.

I mean, I *want* to read about my friends' businesses, and my airline's latest deals, and that cool networking organization in town. But when push comes to shove, I don't. It just clutters up my inbox enough that I sometimes miss the important stuff.

What that means to have inbox clutter

Every email you receive requires you to make decisions.

"Do I think I'll need this?"

"Do I have time to read this right now?"

"Do I have time to respond?"

"Should I keep this?"

"Arrgh! What was I doing?"

Whether your inbox has 40 or 1400 unread messages, it's no wonder you feel ill thinking about it. There's a lot of work.

That's the other thing about inbox clutter - overwhelm. If you're like most people, you have a belief that you "should" make a choice about each email. You "should" read each on thoroughly. Respond to each thoughtfully. And believing all these things makes a body overwhelmed.

Dood. You do not have to deal with each and every email in your inbox.

Honest.

However, you might want to deal with some of them. I mean, there's some good stuff in there, too. Right?

Virtual Spring Cleaning

If this topic is striking a nerve for you, consider one of two suggestions to virtually spring clean your inbox.

The short-term approach:

Start deleting stuff you don't want when it arrives. Even if you think you "should" read it. There's a handy little "delete" button on most email programs for that very purpose.

Warning: it might feel odd.

Doing this reminds me of those gorgeous, colorful mandalas that Buddhist monks create. They spend hours, days creating intricate patterns with individual grains of sand. When it's all complete, they sweep it all up.

Gone. No attachment. It might take some practice to not be attached, but it's a lofty intention. It's also a powerful way to care for yourself.

The long term approach:

If you google "email clutter" you will find a million good ideas on how to make progress in this area.

Here's what I suggest: start noticing and being curious about ways to prevent email. It's that old adage about an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure.

Unsubscribe.

Do you subscribe to newsletters you never read? At the bottom of each of them is a link you can click that will stop you from receiving them forever. If you get 4 per month, that prevents almost 50 emails.

Every now and then, Inspired Home Office gets a smattering of "unsubscribes" from this newsletter. I confess, it used to hurt my feelings... but one day I realized. Hey! They're decluttering! How cool is that?! Now I celebrate them. (Call me crazy, but I call it progress.)

Stop subscribing.

Do you sign up for every cool person's RSS feed? Do you give your email away to any company that asks? Start noticing if you'd like to be more discriminate *before* the emails start pouring in.

I do this a lot with mail-order companies. If you purchase one thing, they often start sending you promotions right away. If they have a click box during the payment process, I "opt out" then so I never have to decide again.

Filters, rules, and secondary folders

If you want to, you can use your email program to do the heavy lifting for you. Most of us understand how spam filters work. You can use this same concept to automatically filter out messages from people or companies you want to hear from, just *not right now*.

Though every email program is different, most allow you to filter messages to bypass the inbox and stick them into a secondary folder you can read at your pleasure. I do this and it's WAY less distracting to check my email - and way less overwhelming. I dare say it's even fun.

The goal is to decide once - and free up your precious time and energy.

It takes time, but you're worth it.

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