Some simple tips to ease the stress, as life can be complicated enough...

MAKING EMAILS WORK FOR YOU

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Set up an auto response letting people know the standard you have for responding to emails, to avoid reminder emails if people are not sure if their email was received, or they expected a response sooner. Let people know your working hours, People working 2 days a week may take longer to reply perhaps than someone who works 5 days. If a prompter response is needed, it may be better asking people to phone you or suggest someone else to contact if the communication is time crucial.

SHARE HOW YOU RECEIVE EMAILS

Emails received on a smart phone may struggle to open attachments. You may work out of the office for days and only use a phone; let people know this as it may take longer for you to reply as you need to wait until you can access a laptop or PC.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

People can use emails for different reasons. Some people use them to collaborate as they find it reduces the time spent in meetings and taking notes. It's helpful to check if this is a mutual understanding. as others may prefer more meetings or phone calls to discuss issues.

BE REALISTIC WITH TIME TO SEND AND REPLY

Dealing with work related emails during time off and annual leave impacts on the time we have to recharge. Set boundaries so that time off, is time off. Deal with what can be dealt with before you go off and leave another contact for emergencies. If you feel you have no other contacts ask yourself, what will happen if you were ill and unable to respond, who will deal with this then?

AVOID COPYING IN PEOPLE WHEN IT IS NOT NEEDED

Sometimes a mail all is helpful for a joint piece of work. Take time to confirm people are okay with this. Consider when replying though. do you need to copy everyone in? e.g., does anyone need several emails of people offering their apologies?

MANAGE YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS

We may find we were once involved in something which added us to a mailing list. We are no longer active in this but continue to receive emails, newsletters and other things which are no longer relevant to our work. Think also about things you add to a 'to read pile' you never get round to. Consider whether it would be helpful for you to politely let the sender know you no longer want to be on the mailing list.

BE CLEAR WHAT THE EMAIL IS ABOUT

Having a clear subject line lets the recipient know what the email is about. If there is a deadline on a response, add this to the subject line. If the recipient cannot respond within that time, they can let you know. We can all often work to different deadlines and not always have the same time to reply. It may be better if this requires discussion to schedule a quick phone call.

HAVE A SIGNATURE BLOCK

Once someone knows you, the signature block is not always used, However, it is helpful when first connecting via email to offer some information on who you are, so the person receiving the email has a sense of who the sender is.

SET THE RIGHT TONE FOR THE SUBJECT

There are times when emails may have an informal tone; however, this may not always be recommended. Consider the purpose of the email and use a tone which is supportive of that purpose.

CHECK AND DOUBLE CHECK

Write the email before adding the recipient address and double check it is being sent to the intended recipient, especially if you have people with the same first name in your mailing list. Proofread the content before sending, especially if you use predictive text, as it may not have inserted what you intended.

REPLY TO EMAILS BUT DON'T REACT

Sometimes an email can create an emotional response and we may have started to construct an email which with a calmer head we may not send. Take time to respond and if there is a matter to be discussed with the sender create space to do this face to face or by phone. Sometimes emails can be misunderstood, sometimes real time conversations are required to address an issue. Emails can be wonderful tools; however, they are not the best communication platform for all situations.

REDUCE DISRUPTIONS

If we are working then the ping of an email alert, or what's app message can be distracting. Switch off notifications to avoid disruptions, unless of course it is an essential message for which you are waiting.

MANAGE TIME

Most of us have more to do than time to do it, so managing the time spent on emails also is important. Have clear times of the day when you check mail and let others know this. Do not accept work related emails on your personal phone. Use the opportunity in emails to create folders which may help organising emails and responses under specific people, group, work plans.
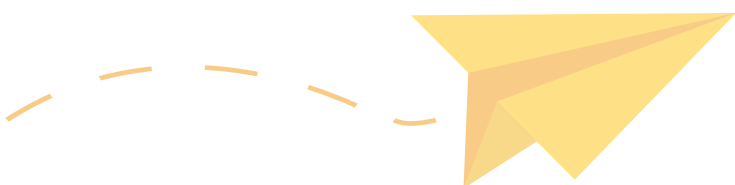
FIND WAYS TO DECLUTTER

Declutter your inbox. If we think about a physical desk which is tidy or cluttered this can help us reflect on which one creates the most feeling of calm and sense of being on top of things. If the email requires to be long, break it into headings as it is a challenge for someone already busy to be hit with a wall of words. This can mean your email gets red flagged as more time is needed to read and respond and due to other commitments ends up being forgotten.

TREAT OTHERS AS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED

None of us like to feel ignored and not responding to an email where a response is requested can cause others unnecessary stress. Even a quick reply saying 'acknowledged' lets the person know they have been heard. We are all busy, so we may feel that we need to apologise for not responding sooner, explaining we didn't have time as we were busy. However, the person at the other end may feel you don't recognise or value their time as they too are busy yet made time to communicate to you. A simple apology, 'sorry, I didn't get back sooner' if required is sufficient. Organise your emails and reduce the times you ask for something to be resent as this causes additional work for the sender. If your workload means you need more time to respond to an email, factor this in when anticipating a reply. It is not realistic if you perhaps need 2 weeks to reply to expect others to reply to you in 2 days. If the work, you are doing together is time critical, make sure to be easily contactable or find another way to communicate with each other as delays of weeks in between communication may impact on project outcomes. Always try to respect each others time.

INSPIRE OTHERS

Adding an inspiring quote, or tip for wellbeing to your email signature can remind you of what matters and also sends the recipient a quote to inspire them also. We are all trying our best; we are not perfect; no one is. Finding ways to reduce the stress of emails when we send and receive them, may just help reduce our overall stress.

LOOK AFTER YOU

Give your eyes a rest, and don't stare at the screen for hours on end. If you need to go to the toilet, hydrate, etc move! Make time to do this. Be mindful of your breathing as sometimes we can hold our breath when constructing an email and forget to breath! Emails are a great tool, but they do not replace human contact. Make time to connect with colleagues in real time too, even if only occasionally, those contacts matter.

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