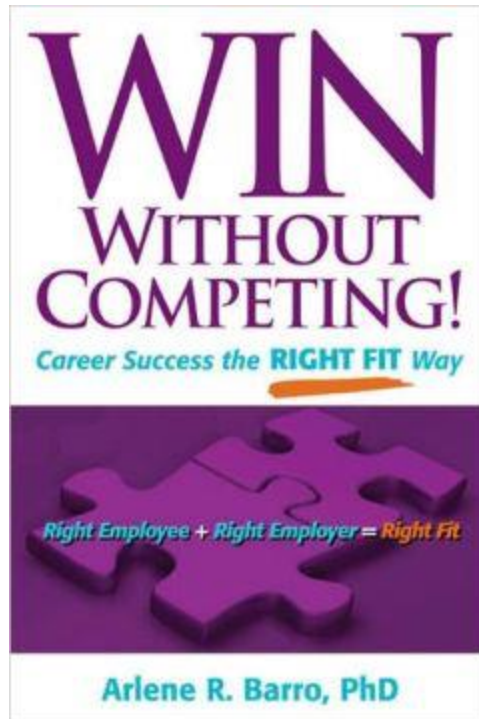


Conquering Stress! With Dr. Arlene—Emailing Causes Stress



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By Dr. Arlene Barro

Why is email, a fascinating communication phenomenon, igniting fear, stress, and anxiety? The Mayo Clinic says “Control email to get control of your life!” Imagine 3.8 billion people globally coping and controlling email before the start of 2019.

Manage Your Email Behavior

Reading email is fatiguing. According to Edward T. Creagan, M.D. from the Mayo Clinic, “Skipping from one task to another depletes glucose which fatigues your brain.” He suggests that we spend no more than 90 minutes on email, take a short break and switch to something else. In the Business Insider, Jacqueline Smith interviews Ron Friedman, psychologist and author, who discusses how we perceive email. He believes that lots of emails in our inboxes make us feel overwhelmed. However, responding to each email “requires another demand on your time and another decision you have to make.”

Here is how I manage email, I review and respond once a day at night. To move the process along quickly, I divide the emails into categories: respond, just delete, read and delete or unsubscribe. Then I file the

important stuff. My approach saves an enormous amount of time, by eliminating obsessive email checking throughout the day which is distracting and heightens anxiety.

Figure out an email schedule that works for you. Friedman cites research which supports the benefits of limiting email checking to a few times a day which “improves well-being and makes work more controllable.” Remember, you decide when to look at email and how to handle it, not the sender.

Identify Email Anxiety

In Psychology Today Alice Boyes, PhD, a practicing clinical psychologist, cites a case of email anxiety. The patient says, “When I try to check my email my heart rate goes up. I start breathing quickly and go into something that is like a panic attack.”

Other email users experience anxiety opening emails, fear of reading emails, and anxiety sending emails. According to Boyes, email is one of the most common triggers for social anxiety and productivity related anxiety focusing on not accomplishing enough. Boyes recognizes that waiting for replies is stressful because we do not know whether people will respond. Even if they do respond, many contextual clues are missing adding more stress.

Responding to an email with extreme stress, anxiety, fear and panic attacks points to self-confidence issues, making erroneous assumptions, and taking things personally.

Eliminate Three Perilous Erroneous Assumptions

1. Email is an effective way to convey information.

If your goal is to convey simple facts such as: see you at noon on Saturday and you state the location, that will work. On the other hand, if both emailers engage in a complex discussion they risk misunderstandings. Sometimes, this back and forth process can lead to dissolving relationships. The result: stress and anxiety. Do not assume that you need to use email for complex discussions. You do not.

2. Limit verbal communications, use email instead.

Hiding behind the veil of email is common. Avoiding verbal communications leads to isolation and stress. Those in hiding usually do a lot of texting, as well. Over the long-term, your verbal and written skills will decline because they are not being used. Do not assume that you need to continue hiding behind your email veil. Gradually reduce the time you spend on email and texting. Instead, arrange a time to speak on the phone or meet in person. Focus on what you need to do, not what society is dictating as proper email behavior. If you can so that, you will shed your cloak of insecurity and build self-confidence.

3. Email is the right communication tool for all messages.

Many people have professional and personal emails. Some email users believe you should say whatever you want. The ongoing Congressional hearings indicate that this is a five star perilous erroneous assumption. Be careful what you write in emails, as well as texts. Do not assume, for example, that divorces, custody battles, and deaths cannot return to haunt you. Prevent problems, do not set the stage to create them.

Avoid making perilous erroneous assumptions, including “no response” is personally directed at you. If you can eliminate this personal erroneous assumption, you will reduce email stress significantly.

Change your mindset and email behavior to master managing email successfully. Thrive.

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