SPEEDMAILING

Turn your work enemy into your best work tool

RICHARD WOLFE

Praise for *Speedmailing*

'Smart people are lazy. So if you want to double your effectiveness and productivity emailing clients, colleagues and friends, read this book.'
Eelco Smit, personal and business coach for entrepreneurs and bestselling author, *Book for MEN*

'Simplicity is underestimated. Richard has sharpened the knife of day-to-day email management in the leanest possible way.'
Nick Bortot, founder and CEO, FinTech startup BUX

'Speedmailing is a concise action plan for mastering email. Richard has distilled thousands of hours of training into an easy to follow guide that will turn your inbox from a burden into a powerful business tool.'
Marshall Hughes, Inbox Zero Coach, coach.me

'Richard gives us a practical approach to email that really works, with useful habits and shortcuts that can drastically change the way we work. If you want to tame the monster that email has become, this book is for you. Forget emailing – the future is Speedmailing!'
Shirley Taylor, bestselling author, *Model Business Letters*, 7th Edition

'All my career I have focused on how we can get more leverage from our brain and process information quicker and better. Richard's way of dealing with email blew me away when I realised that I will spend less energy on a per email basis, today and every day from now on. What a return on investment!'
Mark Tigchelaar, CEO, UseClark and specialist in speed reading and productivity

'An easy and practical life changer, one of these books of which you think: "Why didn't I read that earlier? It would help me so much".'
Marine Guignardeau, Learning and Development Manager, L'Oréal Netherlands

'Until bots and AI solve the hassle of email, dealing with large quantities of email is a skill that is rarely mastered. This is definitely one of the best books on it and should be mandatory for every knowledge-worker.'
Martijn Aslander, speaker, writer and boardroom sparring partner

2 The ground rules of speedmailing

Now that you know the five basic steps to start speedmailing, let's set some ground rules for making this process as effective and efficient as possible.

The three golden rules

1 Empty your inbox one email at a time – and no putting back – making quick decisions and using keyboard shortcuts.
2 If it can be done in two minutes, do it immediately!
3 Check all your action folders weekly.

1. One email at a time – think quickly and use shortcuts

The point of speedmailing is obviously to be as quick as possible – and sorting should be the speediest part of the process.

Your inbox should be a conveyor belt, and you a sorting machine. Don't look for the special emails – the interesting or important ones. That's how you lose time, looking over less important emails again and again as you search. Simply process *all* emails from the top, one at a time. You can address the quick ones on the go. (We'll talk about the two-minute rule in a moment.) Sort all the others into their rightful action folder so you can attend to them in due time. Once you have finished sorting, you will have all your important emails in one place, and you'll be ready to start knocking out your to-dos with maximum efficiency.
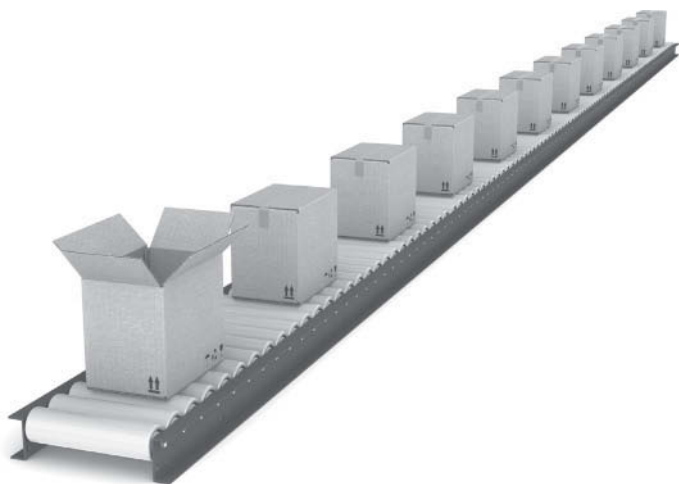
Source: Jojje/Shutterstock

I find it helps to consider yourself in a different role when you enter your inbox. I use the postman metaphor, and visualise putting on a postman hat when starting on my inbox. When I am finished sorting and my inbox is empty, I take it off again and go back to my tasks. A bit weird perhaps, but it works well!

Working this way is not only efficient, but it tackles the most recent emails first – meaning that you can often just ignore older related emails lower in the list. By going through the list in order, you will also get into a flow of decision making and reduce the time spent on each email. Better yet, when your brain goes into autopilot mode, your decision making speed improves and you actually consume less energy. The very definition of efficiency!

When you open an email, simply ask yourself, 'Do I have to act on this email? Is there something *I* have to do?' If the answer is yes but the task cannot be done in two minutes, ask yourself if you need to do it today or this week. If it's a yes again, it goes in 'Do This Week'. If there's a specific date you need to act, save the email to your Calendar. Otherwise you should park it in 'Holding for Later'. When in doubt, put it in 'Holding for Later' and revisit it in your weekly review. (More on that in a moment.)

If the email is *not* waiting for an action from you, then you have three options: delete, file/archive, or sort into 'Waiting for Others'. Just delete anything you know is rubbish or you don't need – note that the keyboard's Delete key will do this automatically. See Chapter 5 for more shortcuts you can use to speed up the process in Outlook and Gmail.

It should take no more than *10–15 minutes to completely empty your inbox* this way. Especially if you embrace using keyboard shortcuts to move emails from your inbox to the required folder. In Outlook this shortcut is Ctrl+Shift+V, followed by typing the first letter of the folder name and then pressing Enter. This sequence seems hard in the beginning, but within days, if not hours, it will become a speedy habit which costs less time and energy than using the mouse.

The second component of the first golden rule is that there is no putting back into your inbox any emails that

Is this an
ACTION for **ME?**

YES → Can it be done in **2 MINUTES?**

YES → **DO IT NOW!**

NO → To **DO THIS WEEK** or **CALENDAR**

NO → To **HOLDING FOR LATER**

NO → To **WAITING FOR OTHERS**

NO → To **FILED ITEMS** or **DELETE**

have been sorted. Once you have decided what to do with an email, it will be banished to one of the action folders. Perhaps it will move between folders, but never back to the inbox. This ensures that your inbox contains *only* new emails you haven't yet seen, allowing you to empty it and get focused faster.

2. Follow the two-minute rule

If the answer to the question 'Do I have to act on this?' is YES and the task can be done quickly, move on to the second golden rule, the *two-minute rule.*

As you sort through your inbox, you'll find many emails that need only a brief answer or question in return, or just a quick retrieval of information. Others are simply short news-letters or a to-do that can immediately be forwarded to someone else. Whatever it is, if it will take less than two minutes to do it, take care of it immediately. It's amazing how many to-dos you can quickly check off your list in this way.

This simple rule can cut your task list in half or more in just the 10–15 minutes it takes to sort your mail, with the bonus of the motivational boost that comes with getting a lot of little stuff done. Now you're ready to go tackle the big to-dos.

> When I am processing my inbox on my mobile I turn the two-minute rule into a 20-second rule. Quick and easy ones I will do, but if an email needs a little more attention and cor-rect typing then I will move it to my 'Do This Week' folder on my mobile so I can deal with it later when I am back behind my computer.

3. Review all folders once a week

The weekly check is a recurring calendar appointment you make for yourself to get a handle on the state of your to-dos. You'll check all your folders, paper notes, etc., *rearranging priorities*, reminding yourself of the items that have slipped your mind, getting ready for the week ahead and closing off the week behind. As I've already mentioned, *this weekly check is your safety net*, catching items that slip through your own fingers or through other people's hands.

Most people like to do the weekly check at the end of the week, but make sure you leave enough time to address any necessary action items. We recommend scheduling it for Friday morning, in a place and at a time you won't be bothered. True, you might not make your appointment *every* week – but make sure you never skip two! Also carve out some time after your check to take care of the lost-and-found to-dos you absolutely must tackle before the weekend.

Your weekly checklist should include:

- **Calendar, past week.** Go through all your recently completed (or missed!) appointments to remind yourself of any actions you still need to take care of. Address those that can be completed within two minutes, or send an email reminder to yourself to be sorted into the appropriate action folder.

- **Calendar, coming week.** Go through all your upcoming appointments and see if any of them require extra attention prior to the meeting. If so, schedule yourself time for those activities or, if you are waiting on someone else, remind them about what you are waiting for.

- **Voicemails.** Now is also a good time to check your voicemail for any missed or saved messages. If any of