

Dianna Booher

Bestselling Author of *Creating Personal Presence*

***FASTER,
FEWER,
BETTER
EMAILS***

**MANAGE
THE VOLUME,

REDUCE
THE STRESS,

LOVE
THE RESULTS**



Praise for *Faster, Fewer, Better Emails*

“Email has become an omnipresent part of our professional and personal lives, so it’s easy to treat it carelessly. This book is a great reminder of how email impacts not only your productivity but your professional reputation and even your security and that of your company. I’ll be implementing Booher’s strategies for me and my team.”

—**Brian Chase, Director, Future Vertical Lift Enterprise Alignment, Bell**

“The incredible Dianna Booher has done it again, providing her unique wisdom and remarkable insights in the ways that only she can. Bravo!”

—**Catherine Blades, Senior Vice President and Chief ESG and Communications Officer, Aflac**

“Dianna Booher has written a must-read book for all those drowning in their email box. She provides practical advice and tips to master your email in today’s digital world.”

—**Virginia Harnisch, Chief Compliance Officer/Managing Director, SMBC Capital Markets, Inc.**

“Finally, a way out of email jail! Seriously, the strategies in this book can cut your email time in half—and improve communication flow.”

—**Kim Campbell, Senior Manager, Customer Advocacy, TXU Energy**

“If you’re a busy executive, have your team read and implement the strategies in this book. The productivity increases for you—and them—will be startling.”

—**Harold R. Loftin, Jr., Chief Legal Officer and General Counsel, GuideStone**

“This book will open your eyes to a whole new way of thinking about email—its purposes, structure, improper uses, security risks, and productivity strategies.”

—**Marshall Goldsmith, author of the *New York Times* #1 bestselling *Triggers*, *Mojo*, and *What Got You Here Won’t Get You There***

“Booher delivers another winner: practical strategies and tips to manage email volume, reduce the feeling of being perpetually overwhelmed, and promote clear communication.”

—**Brian Tracy, author of *Eat That Frog!***

“Dianna Booher is the master of her craft, the communicators’ communicator, the go-to person for getting your point across memorably, efficiently, and effectively. With *Faster, Fewer, Better Emails*, she’s delivered another winner and one you can put to use immediately. It’s got a clear and concise format, practical tips, relevant examples, and a sound strategy for saving time and aggravation. Read this book now and earn immediate thanks from your colleagues and business from your customers.”

—**Jim Kouzes, coauthor of the bestselling *The Leadership Challenge* and Fellow, Doerr Institute for New Leaders, Rice University**

“Practical strategies and tips to get real 24-7 communication gains from email and eliminate the productivity drain it all too often creates. . . . Another hit from Booher.”

—**Ralph D. Heath, former Executive Vice President, Lockheed Martin Corporation**

***FASTER,
FEWER,
BETTER
EMAILS***

OTHER BUSINESS BOOKS BY DIANNA BOOHER

Communicate Like a Leader

Creating Personal Presence

What More Can I Say? (Perigee, 2015)

Communicate with Confidence (McGraw-Hill, 2011)

Booher's Rules of Business Grammar (McGraw-Hill, 2008)

The Voice of Authority (McGraw-Hill, 2007)

Great Personal Letters for Busy People (McGraw-Hill, 2006)

Your Signature Work (Tyndale House, 2004)

Your Signature Life (Tyndale House, 2003)

From Contact to Contract (Kaplan, 2003)

Speak with Confidence! (McGraw-Hill, 2002)

E-Writing (Pocket Books, 2001)

Good Grief, Good Grammar (Ballantine, 1989)

FASTER, FEWER, BETTER EMAILS

Manage the Volume,
Reduce the Stress,
Love the Results

Dianna Booher



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Faster, Fewer, Better Emails

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

1333 Broadway, Suite 1000

Oakland, CA 94612-1921

BK[®]

Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278

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Introduction

I do love email. Wherever possible I try to communicate asynchronously. I'm really good at email.

—**ELON MUSK**, founder and CEO of SpaceX,
cofounder and CEO of Tesla and Neuralink

Lorenzo, a colleague of mine, emailed me to say he needed to find a regional distributor and asked if I'd put the word out to my network. The "ideal distributor" would build a sales team, receive a commission of regional sales, and have an equity position in the company.

Culling my contact list, I emailed him a few prospects for consideration. He connected with all three candidates by phone. Bingo, one showed immediate interest and had all the right credentials—that is, until Lorenzo and the potential distributor began to exchange emails.

Lorenzo emailed detailed information about the distributorship to the candidate, Amy, and asked her to respond with her plans to grow the region. Amy sent back a cryptic email from her smartphone:

Interested , , , traveling very excited sending more
when back in office.

Two weeks later, Amy followed up with another cryptic email. It, too, sounded as though she'd emailed while dashing through an airport security checkpoint, with an unpunctuated stream-of-thought message, grammatical errors and misspellings, and incomplete information.

That's when Lorenzo forwarded Amy's two emails to me with this question:

"Am I overreacting about this person's ability to communicate? Read her emails (below) and tell me if I can afford to

partner with someone like this to represent our company at a senior level? Although she'll eventually be managing and not selling, at the beginning, she will have direct client contact. Can I trust this person to communicate with clients?"

I read the email string Lorenzo forwarded to me. Candidate Amy's excitement about the distributorship potential came through strongly. But her emails looked as if they'd been written by someone just learning the language. In addition to the errors, she rambled on with vague generalities, falling short on specifics.

"Maybe it's a fluke," I responded to Lorenzo. "Maybe she's not feeling well. If she has all the right sales and marketing experience and management credentials, why don't you tell her bluntly how important writing is to the partnership. . . . Just see what she says."

So Lorenzo tried that approach. He mentioned his concerns about her writing, but said he was otherwise thrilled with the growth plans they'd originally discussed on the phone.

Amy's reply? Another rambling, error-filled email.

Lorenzo gave up and moved on to the next candidate. To put it in his words: "I have too much invested in my brand and business to have a distributor who can't compose a simple, clear email!"

CONSIDER IMAGE, SECURITY, LIABILITY

Email matters NOT just because of credibility and clarity. Email also poses security risks and legal liabilities. All that adds up either to big pluses or big minuses, depending on how well your email works for or against you.

For more than three decades, I've been reading emails to and from people at all levels in client organizations across myriad industries—hundreds of thousands of emails. My firm analyzes why the original versions don't work and why the edited versions get better responses.

And the most revealing thing in our work? "Impact" sto-

ries. The lawsuits based on sloppy wording. The loss of clients because of insensitive remarks. Inaccurate payments caused by missing information. Frustration and missed deadlines because of inconsistency in filing important attachments.

This entire book could be a collection of such blunders and their associated career and organizational costs. But that would only cause more stress for the reader. Instead, this book aims to make email work FOR you. The goal is to fix these problems!

STOP THE STRESS AND PRODUCTIVITY DRAIN

I knew we'd reached "email overwhelm" one holiday weekend when my parents were at our home for dinner, and I invited them to stay a little longer. My elderly mom sighed wearily, "Sorry, I guess we'd better go. I need to get home to do email."

Unfortunately, whether employed or retired, most of us are still tapping away. On vacation. At the airport. At the soccer field or gym. At the beach. From a hospital bed—yours or that of a loved one. At bedtime. At sunrise. Over lunch. Chances are, your email habits drain you, both mentally and emotionally. That spells lost productivity for your organization and stress for you. We were told more than two decades ago that email would revolutionize the way we work and save us an enormous amount of time. While email has many benefits, it has also engulfed us and created other productivity drains.

My organization, Booher Research Institute, recently commissioned a survey about email communication habits and productivity from the Social Research Lab at the University of Northern Colorado.¹ Here's what a representative sampling of knowledge workers across multiple industries reported about their email habits (among other things discussed later in this book): Thirty-seven percent spend 1 to 2 hours per day reading and writing email; another 25 percent (one in four workers) spend 3 or 4 hours a day on their email. And, to the question, How often do you *check* email?, 55 percent

(more than half) answered that they check email either hourly or multiple times per hour.

Earlier studies confirm our recent research. According to those studies, the average white-collar worker receives 111 to 131 emails per day and spends 2 to 2.5 hours handling incoming and outgoing email. Earlier studies also report hours that people log on during personal time to check work-related email. Some of the studies depended on self-report; others were based on physical sensors, time logs, and email traffic reports.

While some experts predicted back in the 1990s that communication technology could *potentially* improve our productivity by 20–25 percent, a McKinsey Global Institute study found that, in actuality, technology reduces our productivity by 28 percent for any number of reasons—interruptions, distractions, disorganization, and not finding information to reply with.²

To calculate the cost to an organization, I'll take a \$75,000 salary as an illustration.

White-Collar Worker's Salary at \$75,000

1. Multiply the base salary by 1.4 to account for benefits.

$$\begin{array}{l} \$75,000 \text{ (annual salary of employee)} \\ \times 1.4 \text{ (salary plus benefits)} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

\$105,000 (total annual cost of employee salary & benefits)

2. Multiply total employee cost by percent of time spent on email. Roughly 30 percent of the average worker's time is spent on email, since 2.5 hours/day \times 5 days/week = 12.5 hours of a 40-hour week.

$$\begin{array}{l} \$105,000 \text{ (annual employee cost)} \\ \times .30 \text{ (percent of time spent on email)} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

\$31,500 (total cost to do email 2.5 hrs/day—one employee)

\$315,000 (total cost to do email 2.5 hrs/day—if 10 employees)

\$3,150,000 (total cost to do email 2.5 hrs/day—if 100 employees)

To figure out how much of your own salary you “spend” on email, plug your salary into the above formula. It’s easy to see the payoff for learning to tame the email monster and reclaim uninterrupted work time for an employer. The same goes for you, your work success, and your personal life.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM THIS BOOK

Besides saving money and time, in the seven chapters of this book, you’ll learn how to:

- Identify and stop email clutter—what to stop sending and receiving because it’s either counterproductive or harmful to your image
- Compose *better* emails quickly
- Reduce email length so your messages get action
- Organize common-sense files so you can quickly find documents and emails to attach and send
- Avoid security risks and legal liabilities
- Present a professional image when you email clients and colleagues

Today, most substantive correspondence takes place through email. In essence, how you handle email determines the trajectory of your career. Master your emails—make them faster, fewer, and better—and you’ll stand out as a clear communicator. And clear communicators become effective leaders in every industry.

So let’s get to it. Here are the seven keys to getting through your inbox faster, . . . focusing on the fewer important emails, . . . and writing better emails that build career success.

—*Dianna Booher*

How you handle email determines the trajectory of your career. Master your emails—make them faster, fewer, and better—and you’ll stand out as a clear communicator.

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Twelve Strategies to Cut the Clutter

Email is familiar. It's comfortable. It's easy to use. But it might just be the biggest killer of time and productivity in the office today.

— **RYAN HOLMES**, founder and CEO of Hootsuite

Email is a system that delivers other people's priorities to your attention. It's up to you to decide when that priority should be managed into your world. It's not the other way around.

— **CHRIS BROGAN**, author, marketing consultant, and social media expert

If you've ever tried to move your belongings into a closet or garage previously used by someone else, you understand this principle: Get rid of all the items that served someone else's purpose before you reload that space. You'll typically sort the previous owner's junk into piles: garbage, donate, sell.

Look at your email box the same way: Over the years, you may have let it become a collection of junk serving everyone's purposes but yours. And your own purposes may have changed over time as your job has changed. So cutting your email clutter can be the easiest way to carve away a big chunk of wasted time.

In the earlier mentioned Booher's University of Northern

Colorado (UNC) survey, a whopping 69 percent of the participants identified clutter as their biggest email problem. More specifically, 34 percent identified “volume” as their number-one email irritant. Other clutter problems included irrelevant emails and redundant emails.

Once you set your mind to the idea of freeing your time, decluttering goes quickly. These twelve basic strategies will help you.

Strategy 1: STOP USING EMAIL FOR TASKS OTHER SOFTWARE HANDLES MORE APPROPRIATELY

When email first came into use, it was the tool of choice for everything: scheduling meetings and appointments, collaborating on projects, reviewing draft documents, and so forth. Today, other software does all these tasks more productively.

Take, for example, the process of scheduling an appointment by email. You can do it the nonproductive way—with five back-and-forth emails:

John,
I'd like to discuss this further. How about a call sometime in the next couple of weeks?
Maria

Maria,
Sounds good. I'm traveling Wed–Thurs, but will be in the office Friday. Want to touch base then?
John

John,
What time Friday works for you? I'm available for a call 9–11:00 or 3:00–5:00.
Maria

Maria,
Have a doctor's appointment in the morning. Let's make it 3:00. Which number shall I call?
John

555-9002

Thanks. Talk soon.

Maria

By contrast, you could use a calendaring software program that would require two actions. Someone sends the calendar appointment request with a suggested time. The recipient either confirms or edits the response to an acceptable appointment time. (Or, if both parties are on the same team and use the same operating system or calendar program, they can just ask the automated assistant to find an empty spot on both calendars and schedule the call.)

Another example of tasks better handled by software other than email is project management. When you're collaborating with coworkers on a team project, obviously you'll be planning, commenting, and giving and receiving feedback and information. According to the UNC survey, fully 62 percent of the respondents still use email more than half of the time to collaborate with their colleagues on projects.

Some of this back-and-forth involving tasks, feedback, and timelines can be handled more easily with project management software rather than email (software like Microsoft Project, Basecamp, Asana, Workzone, or Smartsheet). With such software, your project tasks and related feedback, updates, and images can be added into a "running log" that everyone involved can access and add to, keeping related items and comments all together in one place.

Inappropriate tools clutter and slow your progress.

Strategy 2: STOP USING YOUR INBOX FOR STORAGE

When emails that require action hit their inbox, some people leave them there as reminders of what they need to do—later.

A better plan: If you're using Microsoft's Outlook email, you can simply pull that email over and drop it onto your to-do task pane on the appropriate date for follow-up. Or use

the shortcut keys in Outlook to add an item to your tasks. If you're using a different email system, make a manual calendar note—even a note on a paper calendar—of what to do when. Then file the email along with the appropriate contact or project. (See tips in chapter 5, “Organizing Folders and Files.”)

Other “storage” clutter results from indecisiveness. Important emails arrive that get attention—but puzzle you because you don't know where best to file them. So they remain in your inbox for days, creating clutter while you decide where to put them for safekeeping. Then, every so often, you have to reread them to remember the pending action and details, wasting time again.

Read your email **ONLY** once. Think. Decide. Do. Either delete, reply, forward to someone else to handle, or schedule for later action and file it.

Strategy 3: ASK TEAM MEMBERS TO STOP HITTING “REPLY ALL” AND STOP DOING SO YOURSELF

REPLY ALL can clutter your inbox quickly. Instead, send your congratulatory comment directly to the person who deserves the kudos. Offer thanks directly to the person or team who helped you. Turn down the invitation only to the appropriate person. Why clog up seventeen other inboxes, only to have all seventeen of the recipients echo back to you?

A good rule of thumb on the REPLY ALL feature: Is your response helpful to all the others on the distribution list? If not, fly solo. Granted, changing the culture can be difficult. But aim to set the example.

Strategy 4: STOP HANGING ON AND PILING ON WITH MEANINGLESS RESPONSES

You may have caught yourself in the habit of hanging on, wondering where to stop meaningless messages, such as in this back-and-forth series:

Draft report attached.

Ok. Thanks.

You're welcome. Let me know when finished.

Will do. Probably Thursday.

That works.

Maybe sooner.

Fine. No problem.

Enough already! Just stop. Yes, these emails are short. Granted, they don't take much time to write or read. But that's not the point. They clutter. They break your focus. They distract you from more important thinking and doing.

Another clutter practice: "Piling on." Francesca sends out a summary report for the quarter, giving her team a chance to review it before she sends it up the ladder to the executive management team. Seventeen responses flood your inbox: "Looks good." "Sounds great." "Perfect." "Thanks for this." "Great summary." "Nice job." "Well done." "Nothing to add." "You've covered it!"

Vince emails the office to say he's sick and not coming in to work. Five emails hit your inbox in the next two hours: "Sorry you're sick." "Feel better soon." "Got you covered, ole man!" "Hope it's not the flu. Drink, drink, drink—but lay off the hard stuff!" "Thanks for staying home and not exposing the rest of us!"

Distractions, distractions, distractions as they pop into your inbox. Sure, such emails may build camaraderie—but they can irritate and overwhelm you on a busy day.

Help others break the routine habit of piling on. As the sender, state in your email: *"I'm enclosing the quarterly report for your review before I forward it to the executive team Friday. If you have anything to add or see any corrections to be made, reply to me directly. Otherwise, no reply or action is necessary."*