

## Setting Email Boundaries

With today's technology, we have the ability to respond immediately to incoming email messages. But just because it's possible doesn't mean it's the best choice. When we respond immediately, we're conditioning others to expect quick responses, which can then trap us in a perpetual state of reactive behavior; this inevitably leads to the irritating (and nonproductive) habits of email during meetings, email during conference calls, email during the one-hour journey home (you get the picture) just to satisfy the unrealistic expectations that we've created. The result is that email drives us instead of the other way around, which can be frustrating and unsatisfying.

To regain control, we must start by setting boundaries.

- **Manage email interruptions** - Turn off all email notifications, both visual and audio, as these distractions will cause you to lose focus.
- **Limit email processing to once or twice a day** - Unless your role is designed to support short turnaround times, limit the number of times you process your email. This doesn't mean that you can't monitor your email during the day, but there's a distinction between checking for critical items vs. processing (and emptying) your inbox.
- **Manage email response times** - Establish your preferred email response time and let others know what to expect; a 24-hour response time is usually acceptable. Always respond to emails within the response time, even if it's only to let the sender know that you'll be delayed in properly responding to their request.
- **Establish an email protocol** - Email is most effective when team members are clear on how to effectively use it, e.g. when to use the cc line, how to write clear emails, and which situations are best handled by other forms of communication, such as a phone call.
- **Reduce email accounts and inboxes** - Eliminate all unnecessary email accounts where possible. If your company prohibits combining personal and business email, then reduce down to two accounts and inboxes to process: personal and business.