

# Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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## Reducing the Intrusion of E-mail

You may have heard someone remark that e-mail is dead; Don't believe them.

According to a report in *Harvard Business Review* (June 2013) based on a survey of 2,600 workers in the USA, UK, and South Africa, people continue to spend four hours of every working day dealing with e-mail. The reason? They like it, trust it, and find it an effective collaboration tool.

According to a report in *Harvard Business Review* (June 2013) based on a survey of 2,600 workers in the USA, UK, and South Africa, people continue to spend four hours of every working day dealing with e-mail.

Yet, it's far from perfect. E-mail also frustrates workers because three-quarters of e-mails are junk. People find their time wasted with unimportant ads, social-media contacts, and announcements. It's maddening.

How much do we really use e-mail? No surveys on the use of e-mail by pastors are available, but let's assumed that pastors are similar to other working professionals. If that assumption is correct, then pastors spend about 111 days a year dealing with e-mails! That's half of a pastor's working year. Thirteen percent of a pastor's time is spend writing e-mails, 15% reading them, and 22% searching, archiving, and managing them.

E-mail is, though, a very effective collaboration tool. It is the most used tool to connect with other team members, with leaders using on average nineteen distribution lists.

When asked to name the tasks for which they use e-mail, leaders noted most often

exchanging documents (76%) and sending information to groups (69%),

Even with the advantages of using e-mail for collaboration, 11,680 e-mails on average are sent to workers each year.

Fortunately, most of these are blocked from our in-boxes. Of the e-mails that make it to our accounts, 14% are considered critical to our work, 28% essential, 24% functional, 15% low level work, 10% personal, and only 8% spam. But this doesn't count our personal e-mail accounts at home.

So, how can e-mail be reduced so that it doesn't eat up half of our working year? Here are a few suggestions.

**Check out Dr. McIntosh's new website for additional articles.**

New website address:

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# Don't answer e-mails right away.

11,680 e-mails are sent to every worker each year.

First, and the most important, don't send out so many e-mails yourself. It's obvious that we can't control the number of e-mails we receive, but we can control how many we send, and research has found that the fewer e-mails we send the fewer we receive. By not forwarding e-mails unless absolutely necessary, limiting the number of recipients, and choosing a different form of communication to accomplish the task at hand (say, a phone call), the total number of your e-mails may be reduced from 20% to 50%.

Second, don't answer e-mails right away. When you get into the habit of answering e-mails quickly, it makes others feel that you're available immediately. This results in others asking for assistance even when they don't really need it. They think you're readily available, and it's so easy to just pop an e-mail off to you that they do so without thinking about how it affects your time. Thus, it's good to set aside a block of time each day to read and answer e-mails. Experts suggest that no more than 25% of your work day should be given to reading and answering e-mails.

Third, put an automatic announcement on your account to let others know you only answer e-mails between certain times of the day. This is only courteous, but it trains others to know your time is important.

Fourth, have another person read and categorize your e-mails before you look at them. For example, your administrative assistant could read your e-mails and mark them as A=Urgent must be answered today, or B=Important must be answered this week, or C=Interesting could be answered. Then read and answer all the A's, some of the B's and don't read the C's.

Fifth, reply to every person just one time. For example, at the end of the day you may have received several messages from one person. Just answer that person one time by including answers to all of his or her previous e-mails in one reply.

Sixth, get your mind and ears off your in-box by turning off all automatic new e-mail beeps, songs, or whistles. If you don't know there are new e-mails, you'll find it easier to focus on work without the emotional tug to investigate what's behind the incoming alert.

Seventh, for messages that need some research, let the sender know you'll get back to them later. Then flag the message as A=Urgent or B=Important for research the following day or a time you set aside for such activities.

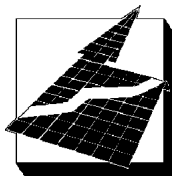
Eighth, answer the easiest e-mails first. This will get you into the mood of answering e-mails and actually make the harder ones flow a bit easier.

How much time do you spend on e-mails each day? What can you begin to do now to take more control of your time?



Gary L. McIntosh is editor of *Growth Points* and speaks at several leadership events each year.

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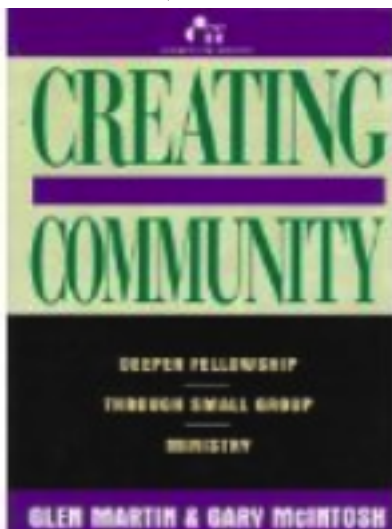
However, not all churches have the will or the skill to begin an effective small group program. In *Creating Community*, two of the most widely recognized leaders in church growth show how you can evaluate the readiness of your church to begin a small group ministry, or multiply and improve your existing groups.

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Dr. Glen S. Martin is the pastor of Journey of Faith Church, Manhattan Beach, CA, and is a national speaker for numerous Christian organizations. He is an adjunct professor at several seminaries and a noted writer, author, and speaker.

Dr. Gary L. McIntosh is President of the McIntosh Church Growth Network and Professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, CA.

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