

## Getting to the top of the email hogpile

Written by Julie Desmond  
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Remember hogpiles? Kids shout Hogpile! And jump onto a heap of people until the kids at the bottom are screaming and everyone is laughing and it's all a lot of fun. Think about the winners of certain sporting events – everyone leaps in, creating a giant pile of happy victors. A joyful moment, but think about the people at the bottom. They are being crushed and smothered and they are missing the TV spotlight because they can't be seen.

Now think about your email inbox. Are you ultra organized and responding to every email instantaneously? I've asked around and now know I am not the only person who regularly sits down in front of 300 or more new emails most days. This raises questions about what's happening to the emails I send. Where in the hogpile are my important messages? How can I be sure my correspondence gets the spotlight when it really matters? A few simple tricks help get messages to the top of the e-heap.

First, send emails to people who know you. If you need to send something to a stranger, first make a quick phone call. Leave a message that says, briefly, what your purpose is, and say, "I'll send you an email to follow up." When someone receives your email, to some degree they will be expecting it and will respond quickly because they have a sense of what it's about before they read it. Long emails from strangers rarely get read.

Long emails, period, rarely get read, or at least don't get read thoroughly. If you have more than a screen's worth of verbiage, put it in an attachment, and let the email itself be a brief summary about why the recipient should read the attachment.

Subject matters. Some subject lines create a sense of curiosity. When Barack Obama was campaigning, he sent out millions of emails. The ones most often opened? By far, it was the email with the word "Hey" in the subject line. "Hey" is familiar, intriguing and nonthreatening. However, Hey from a familiar person is far more effective than Hey from a stranger.

Subject lines that instruct are a relief. An email that says, FYI or No Action Required informs me that I can read this later, or read it and file it away. I can act quickly on that one and will do so. A subject line that is very long can be helpful, too.

"Looking for a contact in Marketing at General Mills" tells the reader, here's what I need; please respond. The reader can open the email to find out who sent this and why, but meanwhile his mind is already running through its mental rolodex to come up with a name.

Good habits are contagious. When you correspond more effectively, others will tend to adopt or mirror your style, meaning the emails you receive will be easier to sort and act upon. It's fun to be under a hogpile, but it's more fun to be somewhere near the top.

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